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PARTISAN REVIEW

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 1943

LOUISE BOGAN
Popular and Unpopular Art

W. H. AUDEN
Two Poems: Canzone
Alonzo to Ferdinand

BENJAMIN FONDANE
Baudelaire and the Abyss

SAUL BELLOW
Notes of a Dangling Man (a story)

MARIO d'ANDREA
The Fate of Italy

REVIEWS BY DELMORE SCHWARTZ, SIDNEY HOOK, HAROLD ROSENBERG, NEWTON ARVIN AND GEORGE L. K. MORRIS

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PARTISAN REVIEW

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TWO POEMS

ALONZO TO FERDINAND

Dear Son, when the warm multitudes cry
Ascend your throne majestically,
But keep in mind the waters where fish
See sceptres descending with no wish
To touch them; sit regal and erect
But imagine the sands where a crown
Has the status of a broken-down
Sofa or mutilated statue:
Remember as bells and cannon boom
The cold deep that does not envy you,
The sunburnt superficial kingdom
Where a king is an object.

Expect no help from others, for who
Talk sense to princes or refer to
The scorpion in official speeches
As they unveil some granite Progress
Leading a child and holding a bunch
of lilies? In their Royal Zoos the
Shark and octopus are tactfully
Omitted; synchronized clocks march on
Within their powers: outside remain
The ocean flats where no subscription
Concerts are given, the desert plain
Where there is nothing for lunch.

Only your darkness can tell you what
A prince's ornate mirror dare not,
Which you should fear more, the sea in which
A tyrant sinks entangled in rich
Robes while a mistress turns a white back
Upon his splutter, or the desert
Where an emperor stands in his shirt

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While his diary is read by sneering
Beggars and, far off, he notices
A lean horror flapping and hopping
Towards him with inhuman swiftness:
Learn from your dreams what you lack,

For as your fears are, so must you hope.
The Way of Justice is a tightrope
Where no prince is safe for one instant
Unless he trust his embarrassment,
As in his left ear the siren sings
Meltingly of water and a night
Where all flesh had peace, and on his right
The efreet offers a brilliant void
Where his mind could be perfectly clear
And all his limitations destroyed:
Many young princes soon disappear
To join all the unjust kings.

So, if you prosper, suspect those bright
Mornings when you whistle with a light
Heart. You are loved; you have never seen
The harbour so still, the park so green,
So many well-fed pigeons upon
Cupolas and triumphant arches,
So many stags and slender ladies
Beside the canals. Remember when
Your climate seems a permanent home
For marvellous creatures and great men,
What griefs and convulsions startled Rome,
Ecbatana, Babylon;

How narrow the space, how slight the chance
For civil pattern and importance,
Between the watery vagueness and
The triviality of the sand,
How soon the lively trip is over
From loose craving to sharp aversion,

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Aimless jelly to paralysed bone:
At the end of each successful day
Remember that the fire and the ice
Are never more than one step away
From the temperate city; it is
But a moment to either.

But should you fail to keep your kingdom
And like your father before you come
Where thought accuses and feeling mocks,
Believe your pain: praise the scorching rocks
For their dessication of your lust,
Thank the bitter treatment of the tide
For its dissolution of your pride,
That the whirlwind may arrange your will
And the deluge release it to find
The spring in the desert, the fruitful
Island in the sea, where flesh and mind
Are delivered from mistrust.

Blue the sky beyond her humming sail
As I sit to-day by our ship's rail
Watching exuberant porpoises
Escort us homeward and writing this
For you to open when I am gone:
Read it, Ferdinand, with the blessing
Of Alonso, your father, once king
Of Naples, now ready to welcome
Death but rejoicing in a new love,
A new peace, having heard the solemn
Music strike and seen the statue move
To forgive our illusion.

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CANZONE

When shall we learn, what should be clear as day,
We cannot choose what we are free to love?
Although the mouse we banished yesterday
Is an enraged rhinoceros to-day,
Our value is more threatened than we know:
Shabby objections to our present day
Go snooping round its outskirts; night and day
Faces, orations, battles, bait our will
As questionable forms and noises will;
Whole phyla of resentments every day
Give status to the wild men of the world
Who rule the absent-minded and this world.

We are created from and with the world
To suffer with and from it day by day:
Whether we meet in a majestic world
Of solid measurements or a dream world
Of swans and gold, we are required to love
All homeless objects that require a world.
Our claim to own our bodies and the world
Is our catastrophe. What can we know
But panic and caprice until we know
Our dreadful appetite demands a world
Whose order, origins, and purpose will
Be fluent satisfaction of our will?

Drift, Autumn, drift; fall, colours, where you will:
Bald melancholia minces through the world.
Regret, cold oceans, the lymphatic will
Caught in reflection on the right to will:
While violent dogs excite their dying day
To bacchic fury; snarl, though, as they will,
Their teeth are not a triumph for the will
But utter hesitation. What we love
Ourselves for is our power not to love,
To shrink to nothing or explode at will,

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To ruin and remember that we know
What ruins and hyaenas cannot know.

If in this dark now I less often know
That spiral staircase where the haunted will
Hunts for its stolen luggage, who should know
Better than you, beloved, how I know
What gives security to any world,
Or in whose mirror I begin to know
The chaos of the heart as merchants know
Their coins and cities, genius its own day?
For through our lively traffic all the day,
In my own person I am forced to know
How much must be forgotten out of love,
How much must be forgiven, even love.

Dear flesh, dear mind, dear spirit, O dear love,
In the depths of myself blind monsters know
Your presence and are angry, dreading Love
That asks its images for more than love;
The hot rampageous horses of my will,
Catching the scent of Heaven, whinny: Love
Gives no excuse to evil done for love,
Neither in you, nor me, nor armies, nor the world
Of words and wheels, nor any other world.
Dear fellow-creature, praise our God of Love
That we are so admonished, that no day
Of conscious trial be a wasted day.

Or else we make a scarecrow of the day,
Loose ends and jumble of our common world,
And stuff and nonsense of our own free will;
Or else our changing flesh may never know
There must be sorrow if there can be love.

W. H. AUDEN

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Some Notes on Popular and Unpopular Art

Louise Bogan

WILL folk art save us from creative and moral aridity if we can find and use it? The reiterated insinuation that formal art is fraudulent because it is difficult to understand and makes no effort to appeal to the majority,—that it is, in fact, somehow treasonable to mankind's higher purposes and aims—is a typical bourgeois notion that has been around for a long time. That formal art cannot be put to any immediate use also lays it open to materialist denigration. The conviction that the simple is straight and pure and true, while the complex is concocted and double-dealing is a partially moral one. It is a conviction which shares room, in the minds and emotions of many people, with an unconscious yearning for a lost rural world. Just enough time has elapsed since real urbanization set in for this yearning to roll up to its present proportions and to have acquired its present rationalizations. In spite of these desires and beliefs of the middle-class subconscious, the fact remains that no civilization has ever produced a literature out of folk (either current or revived) alone. The formal artist cannot be outlawed. The whole question is muddled in the extreme. Let us examine it with as much detachment as possible.

It is true that the formal artist, at least twice within living memory, has succeeded in getting past the barrier of the middle-class to a real folk tradition, and that remarkable literature has resulted in both cases from the intersection of the formal with the folk line. Lorca's genius was ignited in the most brilliant way by Flamenco tradition and Yeats was fortified and refreshed from the beginning by his close knowledge of the Irish peasant. Both these poets received the experience of poetry still attached to music, at the improvisatory stage; and of audience creatively involved (actually listeners, as distinguished from mere readers) in what they as poets produced.

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But the fact is that only the most abnormal situations, political or otherwise, kept these two folk traditions alive so late in an industrial and urbanized Europe. The turning toward the folk, at the end of the 19th century, was not only pre-industrial but pre-revolutionary; and the same sort of ferments were present in Yeats' Ireland and Lorca's Spain. The current attempts in America to get back to primitive material are natural enough, but they are different. They are the desire of a far from revolutionary population to get back to some earlier fun, as well as some earlier integrity. Certainly the material is there. We can trace the line of the American folk song through the ballads of English, Irish and Scotch origin (broken away from their original scene and transformed) through the work-songs of all kinds (sea-shantys, songs of the plantation and the cattle-range), the hymns and spirituals, up to the beginning of town-life. Then the culmination of the American folk-song appears. Stephen Foster, the untrained and greatly gifted writer of "popular songs", managed to express fully the emotions common during this period of transition. On the one hand, through him the loneliness as well as the rough gaiety of a primitive society found its voice. On the other, Foster gave expression to something quite new: an emotion which was to become increasingly persistent in the American spirit: the sense of profound nostalgia for an already disappearing non-urban way of life. The strong sentimentalization of Foster by his modern audience proceeds from the holdover of this crucial though hidden nostalgia into our own time. Clearly, he was the end of one kind of American folk, the point beyond which no unadulterated development of his kind of material was possible.

We begin to get the production of the urbanized folk, after the hymns and marching songs of the Civil War. The railroads building and having been built, we get the railroad songs. The cities once made, we get the hybrid genteel, and the barber-shop ballads, and, what is more vivid and interesting, the songs of the "underworld": brothel, saloon, dope-joint and prison. The earlier tradition fell into neglect as the way back to the farm became more and more closed. It was rediscovered and refurbished, along with hooked rugs and pine blanket chests

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when the 1914 War broke up American Victorian and aroused, in some not quite understandable fashion, the middle class enthusiasm for the American antique. The folk tradition, as a result, has become thoroughly bourgeoizified. At present there is no way for the artist to get at it, for it has been dragged into a region where nothing living or nutritious for his purposes exists. It can be looked at and listened to, admired and imitated; but it cannot at the present time be called upon to do any truly important task. Only a writer thoroughly immersed in middle-class values, and soaked through and through with the sentimentality of the middle, could for a moment believe that this mummified and genteelized folk could contribute any spark of life to his purposes.

The English and French tradition of town-folk (with a head start of some forty or fifty years of true industrialism over the United States) chanelled itself into the music-hall. "The supreme embodiment of the surviving character of the English working people", writes one chronicler of the English 19th century scene, "was the music-hall. . . . Springing spontaneously out of the sing-song of the upper tavern room and the old out-of-door gardens of the artisans of the pastoral past, it became for a space of time a British institution. Its morality was to make the best of a bad job; its purpose to make everyone free and easy. . . ." The authenticity of this institution, created by the first articulate development of urban folk for its own enjoyment soon impressed itself on the artists and writers of the time. Through it, they were able to skirt the middle, find excitement and restorative energy and make a point of contact with "life". But the music-hall decayed. It was based on that period of "proletarian" existence when the workers were stiffly encased in the tradition of knowing their place and imitating their betters. This tradition exploded in 1918; and we hear Eliot making a final tribute to Marie Lloyd, with added gloomy prognostications for the future:

> ". . . It was her capacity for expressing the soul of a people that made her unique. . . . It was her understanding of the people and sympathy with them, and the people's recognition of the fact that she embodied the virtues that they most genuinely respected in private life, that raised her to the position she

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> occupied at her death. I have called her the expressive figure of the lower classes. There is no such expressive figure for any other classes. The middle classes have no such idol: the middle classes are morally corrupt . . ."

Eliot then goes on to express his fear that, with the disappearance of the music-hall, and "the encroachment of the cheap and rapid-breeding cinema, the lower classes will drop to the same state of protoplasm as the bourgeoisie", and, moreover, when this state has overcome them, that they may die off from sheer boredom! This essay, written in 1923, closes with words of deep dismay as to the possibility of the hastening of this general disintegration by the development of another mechanical device for transmitting amusement,—the radio.

Eliot underestimated his "lower classes". The music-hall disappeared only after it had reached a high point of breadth and elegance. Folk expression continually runs toward this elegance, contrary to the *idée recue* of its being by necessity clumsy and "vulgar". (And this elegance is not to be confused with the empty slickness of the revue kind.) But as a rather stuffy set of pre-war conventions broke, the urban crowd shifted toward a freer, less imitative and reverent habit of mind and manner. Something new began immediately; persistent energy released itself into new forms and new media.

The energy is now at a more primitive level than formerly; these shifts go back and forth, as this current of urban life or that is released and breaks; many reasons requiring specialized attention are here involved. But the fact remains that American folk has never been more vigorous than at this moment. Words are attached to music, as in all primitive states of poetry and music. Improvisation (the "lick") is in every talented performer's power. The rhythm is the important matter; the music has all the harmonic tricks under control with which to surround and embellish the beat. The various mechanical devices which Eliot feared and deplored have served, as a matter of fact, to aid the development and dissemination of this folk-art. The folk now gets exactly what it wants to listen to. If the radio does not give it what it needs in sufficient quantity, people have their records and juke boxes, and, of course the live performers. The vigor of folk at present is shown by its tendency to raid over

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into "classical" and bring back whatever tunes please it. The juke box repertoire is a thing in itself: there the hymn tune (disguised) shares popularity with the crooned ballad and certain holdovers from the open spaces of the past. Compared to the songs of the upright piano and sheet music era, even the most naive songs are less awkward and saccharine, more vitalized. And the imitation "folk-song," such as the really remarkable "Blues in the Night", had taken on a finish which always characterizes folk in a good creative period *of its own.*

It is interesting to note that at this particular stage, "popular" interest in accident, sudden death, and the morbid in general (unlike American songs of an earlier day) has very nearly disappeared, along with the "topical song", that sister to the broadsheet.

A proposition could be drawn up:

Folk crosses formal art:

1.) When folk has reached a moment of comparative breadth and elegance (when it can express anything, from the grotesque through emotion and satire, well.)

2.) When formal art has become easy and secular enough to recognize just where folk lies; and having located folk, understands what is happening there.

A long period of time must elapse before, in America, the demands of this proposition can be fulfilled. But Eliot's fears were unjustified; just as the present middle-class hope that L. Stowkowski can be crossed with Disney, or some genteel poet with the songs of pioneering backwoodsmen, is at once previous and misplaced.

Let us now take a brief glance at the American intellectual. The intellectual is a middle class product; if he is not born into the class he must soon insert himself into it, in order to exist. He is the fine nervous flower of the bourgeoisie. His task, ideally, would be the close critical observation of the field in which he stands, while keeping his attention alert for new movement in the landscape as a whole. That the intellectual fails in this job, is one reason for the wholesale mixture of

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genres, the unrebuked mistakes of prize committees, publishers, etc., the general insolence of entrepreneurs,—in fact the general failure to understand what is going on which marks the small remaining section of American life still interested in literature.

The intellectual, being nervous, is subject to all the floating airs of modern religion (present in quantity, no matter how fogged and misted into the semblance of something else). One must not forget that religious enthusiasm (and intolerance) has always been inextricably mixed with every materialist idea; has been a concomitant of all material push since Calvin. Intellectuals range through the finest gradations of kind and quality: from those who are merely educated neurotics, usually with strong hidden reactionary tendencies, through mediocrities of all kinds, to men of real brains and sensibility, more or less stiffened into various respectabilities or substitutes for respectability. The number of Ignorant Specialists is large. The number of hysterics and compulsives is also large. It is natural that the truly sensitive intellectual should have spiritual needs; for such a person the necessity for that one moment in life when one is forced to see reality without wraps and unrationalized, is strong. This necessity leads to a real break-through into maturity on the part of some individuals. For the less sensitive, the spiritual necessity hardly exists; they require not steadying insight but emotional outlet. It is in this class that we find the hot-gospellers, the morally pretentious, the reformers and the seekers of closed systems of salvation. These men and women are not entirely the products of an imperfect culture (for the type appeared in quantity in France in the 19th century) but of a culture somehow blocked and mixed; and of the impact of this curious situation upon natures more simply constituted than they themselves suppose. Flaubert wrote down an approximation of the type in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. He gave the two simple-minded copyists a set of manias which is still complete for the dislocated middle-class mind of our time; manias ranging from the collecting of antiques to an absorption in various forms of science and politics. These two prototypes of the middle-class yearner with a few retouches could represent not only the modern lecture-listening audience, but many of "the

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experts who tend the complicated machinery of modern civilization."

One characteristic of the Bouvard-Pécuchet sort of enthusiasm is the violent repuduation after violent interest of one craze after another when the satiation point is reached. The revulsion shown by the intellectual toward the artist, during recent years, resembles this sort of compensating tendency. The too-great emphasis of emotion and hope placed upon the artist in the preceding period is lifted and placed at an opposite point. The D. H. Lawrence, Proust, Hart Crane kind of semi-worship went over, for a time, to Malraux; and then became transformed into something else. The very complexity of the artist's equipment became as much a target for the subsequent badgering and denigration as the non-material quality of his aims. It is moral blame of the most childish kind that we find most frequently expressed; and real puzzlement, also at a childish level. The atmosphere of former religious paroxysms and squabblings returns; the old fights between established religion and the sects and between the sects themselves; the old tiresome yet dangerous extremes of the persecutory centuries.

Now, one would think that the unstable intellectual should stand out against all these moral acrobatics and tergiversations: if not as judge, at least as arbiter. If he cannot remain firm, he should at least be in another part of the field, out of the melée and ahead of it. But as things turn out, he is either squarely in the mix-up, name-calling with the best or, making motions of advancing the while he has managed rapidly to retreat into something truly comforting in the way of pre-Copernican scholasticism; or has made a full flight back to Aristotle.—And if he is of no real use in reconciling embattled sects, perhaps he could do a little simple journeyman's work in keeping èntrepreneurism in its place. But here he rather fails us, too.

At this point it is necessary to remember that the middle-class has produced, at the expense of much time and effort, a whole literature of its own. Its own writers, bred out of its own bone and flesh, educated in its own schools and amenable to its own scheme of manners and customs have fanned out into the

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middle region; adapted in every way to express the middle intellect, temperament, grasp of reality, powers of analysis and emotion. Some of these poets, novelists, critics, biographers and belleslettrists were born middle; some either rose or sank to where they at length find themselves. The complicated but smoothly oiled machinery of the publishing business, the general run of reviewers, the committees giving out literary awards, the more benumbed mass of academics: all these agents function, for the most part, (and changing the figure) inside the same structure. During certain short periods, certain wild individuals stay outside and throw rocks, but since these intransigeants tend to disappear for long intervals, the easiest supposition is that they are absorbed. And the periods of almost complete absorptions present a very amusing spectacle indeed. These are the times when the book-sections produce, week after week, month after month, serious judgments on books, but when everything judged and the judges themselves are cut out of the same piece of medium material. The commodity books are being dealt with by the commodity critics—a spectacle which would be purely funny if there were not elements of rather tragic irony in it.

The intellectual should at least know the difference between kinds, and have the courage to speak up when matters get really out of hand. He should make some admonishing gesture when a particularly startling piece of mutual aid comes through. He should know how the literary mechanism works: the way blurb-writing and prize-giving, journalists and literary impresarios engage with each other. He should be able to sense, watching the open pulls and twitches given reputations, all the subterranean manoeuvring which must go on so that certain effects are produced at eye-level. What about the distinguished specialists who write blurbs for dust-jackets? Is this a harmless bit of fun, or a plan to get around the subsequent remarks of the book-reviewer? What about the one American prize committed(situated rather disadvantageously, one might suppose, for anyone not a journalist, in a school of journalism) which, having ignored brilliant talent, young and old, falls back ever again upon old standbyes? What about the extra-literary influ-

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ences which manage, from time to time, to bring to laudatory view a book of gibberish? What about certain anthologists who teeter on the verge of being members of the vanity press: are all their contributors paid? Who is to deal with these matters but the intellectual?

Meanwhile, the cry rises that poetry has disappeared. This plaint often comes from the dead center, say from the core of the Sunday book section. It rises with particular sharpness during times of cataclysm. The middle wishes poetry to throb, as it were, under the historic processes without a break; to light up ambiguous terrain with continual succeeding flashes of "inspiration". But poetry cannot be counted upon to act as a sort of combination faith-healing and artificial thunder and lightning. Poetry of the lyric order disappears for a century at a time. It shifts. And when the formal line has in some manner been exhausted, the vigor goes back to the base. The middle must put up with what it has: their flabby little songs, their attempts at reviving the "golden" American past; and their more ambitious flights: those attempts to combine autobiography with *post hoc ergo propter hoc* comment on the world situation.

"The function of the great individual is to take up and transform what has been communally produced". For this function one must wait, when the folk material is in a transitional or promotive phase—unmalleable and too full of its own rough vigor to be handled and "great individuals" seem to be lacking. Even the artist may misjudge the time. In Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes* and *Fragment of an Agon* the two lines—of formal treatment and "rough" material—are somehow artificially combined; the result cannot really move us. But there are times when the poet can deal with whatever comes to hand. And folk will not always remain ungraspable.

A few notes on the future direction of the poet:

The true hierarchic attitude as exemplified by some "inheritors of Symbolism" (Stefan George and to a lesser degree Valéry and Yeats) seems to be exhausted. George's "willed rationalism toward the antique, his aesthetic and individualist

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humanism . . . which seeks in the universe the exaltation of man" —this line we have seen warped and corrupted; it now leads nowhere. The lesser task of the poet at present is satire. But satire cannot be asked to bear all of the weight of the diversified and subtle modern spirit. There is another development of this century's early period of aesthetic experiment and moral explanation. This proceeds from Rilke. "In Rilke (as opposed to George)" writes Genevieve Bianquis, already quoted above, "exists the most absolute abandonment to the laws of the inanimate; the need to unknot, to detach the bonds of the individual; the need to love everything, to absorb everything into himself and to absorb himself in all; to channel toward God or toward things all happiness, all sorrow and all emotion."—This is the contrast between the will which builds Ages of Faith and the act of faith itself; between compulsion and serenity, arrogance and humility; between the raw act of force and the more complex refusal of force but openness to spiritual power.

The foundation-material is ready for this tendency. The only really usable and incontrovertible modern discoveries are in the spiritual field; and these have their everyday diagnostic and therapeutic uses. Truth has been told, experience undergone and movement undertaken—"forward" as Eliot says; but this forward has not its old "progressive" connotation. The number of individuals engaged in writing poetry of this order will not be large, and, as is so often the case, may be unseen by their generation. The forms will be kept clear and the tone uninflated. No more rhetoric; no more verbalizing; no more exhortations or elegies or eulogies. No more conscious and affected investigations of dark corridors and deserted strands; no more use of the universe as a backdrop against which one acts out hope or despair. No more dejected sitting about. No more searching nature for an answering mood. . . .

This exploration and movement can go on without having to search out the folk for refreshment. The more complex tasks have been neglected for a long time; attention to them is overdue. Compared to these at once subtle and difficult necessities the re-iterated standardized demands of the bourgeois yearner sound incredibly stupid and out-dated.

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> "Is it possible that despite our discoveries and progress, despite our culture, religion and world-wisdom, we still remain on the surface of life? Is it possible that we have even covered this surface which might still have been something, with an incredibly uninteresting stuff which makes it look like drawing-room furniture during the summer holidays?
> "Yes, it is possible . . .
> "But if all this is possible . . . then surely, for all the world's sake, something must be done. The first comer, he who has had these disturbing thoughts, must begin to do some of the neglected things; even if he be just anybody, by no means the most suitable person: there is no one else at hand. This young insignificant foreigner, Brigge, will have to sit down in his room five flights up, and write, day and night. Yes, he will have to write; that will be the end of it".

This was written at the beginning of the century; but nothing much seems to have been accomplished. Now that a good deal of the drawing-room furniture lies in ruins, there may be another beginning.

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Notes of a Dangling Man

Saul Bellow

NEARLY seven months have gone by since I resigned my job at the Inter American Travel Agency to answer the Army's call for induction. I am still waiting. It is a trivial seeming thing, a sort of bureaucratic comedy trimmed out in red tape. At first I took that attitude toward it myself. It began as a holiday, a short reprieve, last May, when I was sent home because my papers were not in order. I have lived here eighteen years, but I am still Canadian, a British subject, and although a friendly alien I could not be drafted without an investigation. I waited five weeks and then I asked Mr. Mallender at Inter American to take me back temporarily, but business had so fallen off, he told me, that he had been obliged to lay off Mr. Trager and Mr. Bishop in spite of their long years of service and could not possibly help me. At the end of September I was informed by letter that I had been investigated and approved and again, in accordance with the regulations, I was instructed to present myself for a second blood test. A month later I was notified that I was in 1A and told to hold myself ready. Again I waited. Finally, when November came, I began to inquire and found that through a new clause affecting married men my induction had been postponed. I asked for reclassification, pleading that I had been prevented from working. After three weeks of explaining I was transferred to 3A. But before I could act, in a week, to be accurate, I was summoned for a new blood test; (each holds good for only sixty days). And so I was shifted back. Married men without dependents were to be taken immediately. This tedious business has not ended yet, I am sure. It will drag on for another two, three, four months.

Meanwhile Iva, my wife, has been supporting me. She claims it is no burden and that she wants me to enjoy this liberty, to read and to do all the delightful things I will be unable to do in the Army. About a year ago I ambitiously began several essays, mainly biographical, on the philosophers

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of the Enlightenment. I was in the midst of one on Diderot when I stopped. But it was vaguely understood when I began to dangle that I was to continue with them. Iva did not want me to get a job. As 1A I culd not get a suitable one anyhow.

Iva is a quiet girl. She has a way about her that discourages talk. We no longer confide in each other; in fact there are many things I could not mention to her. We have friends but we no longer see them. A few live in distant parts of the city. Some are in Washington and some in the Army; one is abroad. My Chicago friends and I have been growing steadily apart. I have not been too eager to meet them. Possibly some of our differences could be mended. But, as I see it, the main bolt that held us together has given way and so far I have had no incentive to replace it. And so I am very much alone. I sat idle in my room anticipating the minor crises of the day, the maid's knock, the appearance of the postman, mealtimes, programs on the radio and the sure, cyclical distress of certain thoughts.

I have thought of going to work but I am unwilling to admit that I do not know how to use my freedom and have to embrace the flunkeydom of a job because I have no resources, in a word, no character. I made an attempt to enlist in the Navy last time I was reclassified but induction, it seems, is the only channel for aliens. There is nothing to do but wait and dangle and grow more and more dispirited. It is perfectly clear to me that I am deteriorating, storing bitterness and spite which eat like acids at my endowment of generosity and good will. But the seven months' delay is only one of the sources of my harrassment. Again, I sometimes think of it as the backdrop against which I can be seen swinging. It is still more. Before I can properly estimate the damage it has done me I shall have to be cut down.

Dec. 16

My father-in-law, old Almstadt, came down with a bad cold and Iva, knowing how inept her mother is, asked me to go there and help out.

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The Almstadts live on the Northwest side, a dreary hour's ride on the El. I found the house in great disorder. Mrs. Almstadt was trying to make the beds, cook, attend her husband and answer the telephone all at the same time. The telephone was never idle for more than five minutes. Her friends kept calling and to each she repeated the full story of her troubles. I have always disliked my mother-in-law. She is a short, fair, rather maidenish women. When visible, her natural color is healthy. Her eyes are large and they wear a knowing look, but since there is really nothing to be knowing about they only convey her foolishness. She is powdered thickly and her lips are painted in the shape that has become the universal device of sensuality for all women, from the barely mature to the very old. Mrs. Almstadt, nearing fifty, is already quite wrinkled, much to her concern, and she is forever on the watch for new packs and face lotions.

When I came in she was busy talking to someone and I went to my father-in-law's room. He was lying with his knees drawn up and his shoulders raised so that his short-haired red head seemed joined without a neck directly to his body. Through an opening in his pajamas, his flesh showed white and fatty under greying hair. He looked unfamiliar in the high buttoned tunic with the crest on the pocket, and a little ludicrous. This was Mrs. Almstadt's doing. She bought his clothes and she had dressed him for bed like a Mandarin or a Romanoff prince. His broad knuckles were joined on the silken quilt. He greeted me with a not wholly ungrudged smile and also as though it might be considered unmanly or unfatherly to fall sick. At the same time, however, he tried to make it plain that he could afford to spend a few days in bed; he was far enough ahead of the game; the business (this he told me with conflicting nonchalance and defiance) was in good hands.

The phone rang again and Mrs. Almstadt once more began to tell her story to one of her innumerable connections (who knew who they were). Her husband had come down yesterday and they had the doctor in, and the doctor had said there was a regular epidemic of grippe this winter. She was worn out, just

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worn out trying to keep house and take care of Mr. Almstadt. You couldn't leave a sick person alone . . . and what could you do without a maid. Her words showered down like little glass pellets upon us. Old Almstadt gave no indication that he heard; at times he seemed automatically deaf to her. But of course it was impossible not to hear her; she has a high, atonal voice which penetrates everywhere. And what I now became curious to know was whether he was unaffected or whether she was a nuisance to him. In the five years I had been his son-in-law I had heard neither criticism nor defense of her from him save on two occasions when he said, "Katy's still a child; she never grew up."

Before I was aware of it, I was saying, "How do you stand it? How did you ever manage to stick it out so long, Mr. Almstadt?" "Stick out? What?" he said. "With her," I plunged on. "It would get me, I know it would?" "What are you talking about?" the old man asked, perplexed and angry. I suppose he thought it dishonourable to allow anyone to say such things to his face. But I could not help myself. It seemed, at the moment, not an error but a very natural inquiry. I was suddenly in a state of mind that required directness for its satisfaction. Nothing else would do. "I don't know what you mean," he said again. "Well, listen to her." "Oh," he said, "you mean the telephone." "Yes, the telephone." He appeared somewhat relieved. "I don't pay any attention to it. All women are talkers. Maybe Katy talks more than most, but you got to allow for that. She. . . ." "Never grew up, is that what you mean?" I interrupted. I doubt that this was what he intended to say, but as he was the originator of the phrase he could not dissent. Lips tightly drawn together he nodded. "Yes, that's right. Some people just turn out different than others. Everybody isn't alike." He spoke stiffly; he was still angry. He had to make allowances for me, too, once in a while. My behavior was not always what it should be, he thus indirectly gave me to understand. His color had thickened furiously; it was slow to recede. Harsh and red his face shone under the branched brass fixture whose light had a singular hue, like tea. Was he deliberately covering up an opinion which,

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it must be conceded, he had every right to hold privately, or did he believe what he said. The latter was the more likely explanation. Babble, tedium and all the rest, were to be expected, they came with every marriage. There was still another possibility to consider and that was that he was not resigned and that he did not ignore her as he pretended but—and there was every likelihood that he was unaware of this—heard and delighted in her, wanted her slovenly, garrulous, foolish and coy, took pleasure in enduring her. His face, as we looked at each other, took on a doglike aspect. I was perturbed and rebuked my imagination for the unfair and inhumane comparison it drew.

The doctor had left a prescription. The old man asked me to take it to the drug store. As I went out I heard Mrs. Almstadt saying, "My Iva's husband is here to lend a hand. He isn't working now, he's waiting for the Army so he has all the time in the world." I started and turned full of indignation, but she smiled at me all oblivious. I wondered whether it was possible that she should not have said it intentionally, that she should be blameless; whether her thoughts were as smooth and contentless as counters or blank dominoes; whether she was half guile and half innocence; or whether there worked through her a malice she herself knew nothing about.

There was a sharp wind outside; the sun, low and raw in a field of coarse clouds, ruddied the bricks and the windows. The street had been blown dry (the day before had been damp) and it presented itself in one of its winter aspects, creased and with thin sidelocks of snow, vacant, as Chicago streets often are, and as if its human use had for all times ended.

As I was going back, an exhibit in a barber-shop attracted me. "Fancy articles from kitchen odds and ends by Mrs. J. Kowalski, 3538 Pierce Avenue". And there were laid out mosaic pictures, bits of matchstick on mats of leaf from old cigar butts, ashtrays cut from tincans and shellacked grapefruit rind, a braided cellophane belt, a letter opener inlaid with bits of glass, and two handpainted religious pictures. In its glass case the striped pole rolled smoothly, the Lucky Tiger watched from a thicket of bottles, the barber read a magazine. Turning with my package I went on and entered through the grey pillars

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and the ungainly door which clanked on the mailboxes, the sad cavern of the hall.

Upstairs, I worked energetically on the old man. I dosed him with the medicine, had Mrs. Almstadt make a pitcher of orange juice and rubbed him down with alcohol. He grunted with pleasure during the massage and said that I was stronger than I looked. We were on better terms by this time. But I did not reply. Silent, I could not make another mistake and, moreover, if I began to talk I would soon find myself explaining my position and defending my idleness. Old Almstadt did not bring the subject up. My own father, I must say, treats me less considerately in that respect. He would have asked me, but Mr. Almstadt said nothing about it.

Relieved that the subject had been avoided, I rolled down my sleeves and was preparing to go when my mother-in-law reminded me that she had poured a glass of orange juice for me in the kitchen. That was not lunch but it was better than nothing. I went to get it and found on the kitchen sink a half cleaned chicken its yellow claws rigid, its head bent as though to examine its entrails which ravelled over the sopping draining board and splattered the enamel with blood. Beside it stood the orange juice, a brown feather floating in it. I poured it down the drain. In my hat and scarf, I wandered to the living room where I had left my coat. Mr. and Mrs. Almstadt were conversing in the bedroom. I looked out of the window.

The sun had been covered up; snow was beginning to fall. It was sprinkled on the black pores of the gravel and lying in thin slips on the slanting roofs. I could see a long way from this third floor height. Not far off there were chimneys, their smoke a lighter gray than the grey of the sky; and straight before me, ranges of poor dwellings, warehouses, billboards, culverts, electric signs blankly burning, parked cars and moving cars and the occasional bare plan of a tree. These I surveyed, pressing my forehead on the glass. It was my painful obligation to look and to submit to myself the invariable question: Where was there a particle of what, elsewhere, or in the past, spoke in Man's favor? There could be no doubt that these billboards, streets, tracks and houses, ugly, crude and blind,

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were related to interior life. And yet, I told myself, there had to be a doubt. There were human lives organized around these ways and houses and that they, the houses, say, were the analogue, that what men created they also were, through some transcendent means, I could not bring myself to concede. There must be a difference, a quality that eluded me, somehow, a difference between things and persons and even between acts and persons. Otherwise the people who lived here were actually a reflection of the things they lived among. I had always striven to avoid blaming them. Was that not in effect behind my daily reading of the paper? In their businesses and politics, their taverns, movies, assaults, divorces, murders, trials in court, I tried continually to find clear signs of their common humanity.

It was undeniably in my own interest, too. Because I was involved with them to no inconsiderable extent; because whether I liked it or not they were my generation, my society, my world. We were figures in a common plot. I was aware, also, that their existence, just as it was, made mine possible and that we were eternally fixed together. And if, as was often said, this portion of a century was approaching the nether curve in a cycle then I too would remain on the bottom and there, extinct, merely add my body, my life, to the base of a coming time. This would probably be a condemned age. But . . . it might be a mistake to think of it in that way. Mists faded and spread and faded on the pane as I breathed. Perhaps a mistake. And when I thought of the condemned ages and those unnamed, lying in their obscurity, I wondered. . . . But how did we know how it was? In all principal ways the human spirit must have been the same. Good leaves fewer traces than bad. We knew now we had misjudged whole epochs. Besides the giants of the last century had their Liverpools and Londons, their Lilles and Hamburgs to contend against as we have our Chicagos and Detroits. And there might be a chance that I was misled, even with these ruins before my eyes, sodden, themselves the color of the fateful paper that I read daily. . . . The worlds we sought were never those we saw; the worlds we bargained for were never the worlds we got. . . .

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Dec. 22

An unusual explosion of temper this afternoon when I was with Myron Adler. I behaved unaccountably, greatly surprising myself and, of course, bewildering Myron altogether. He had phoned me about a temporary job taking public opinion interviews in a study he is directing. I hurried down to meet him at the *Arrow* for lunch. I arrived first and took a table toward the back and immediately fell victim to depression. I had not visited the *Arrow* for a number of years. It was at one time a hangout for earnest eccentrics where, at almost any hour of the afternoon or evening, you could hear discussed socialism, psychopathology or the fate of European Man. It was I who had suggested that we eat there; for some reason it had been the first place that came to my mind. Now it depressed me. Then, as I looked round at the steam tables and the posters of Japanese with rat faces and foundering ships, I suddenly saw Jimmy Burns sitting at a table with a man I did not know. Since the days when we were Comrade Joe and Comrade Jim, we had seen each other no more than two, perhaps three times. He looked changed; his forehead had grown a little higher and his expression more severe. I nodded to him but got no recognition for my pains; he looked through me in the way which, I suppose, is officially prescribed for "renegades".

When Myron came in a few minutes later and started at once to talk about the job, I said impatiently, "Wait a second, now. Just hold on." "What's the matter?" "Something very special. Wait till I tell you. You see that man in the brown suit, over there? That's Jimmie Burns. Ten years ago I was privileged to call him Comrade Jimmy." "Well?" said Myron. I said hello to him and he acted as if I simply wasn't there." "Well," said Myron again. "Stop repeating that, will you?" I said exasperated. "I mean, do you want him to throw his arms around you?" asked Myron. "You don't get the point. I despise him. But he has no business ignoring me. I'm going to go right up to him and say hello whether he likes it or not." "Don't be a fool. What do you want to make trouble for?" said Myron. "Because I feel like making trouble. Does he know me or doesn't he? He knows me perfectly well," I said growing angrier. I'm surprised

(*continued on p.* 429)

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Baudelaire and the Experience of the Abyss

Benjamin Fondane

THE tragedy of Baudelaire lies in this—he could not realize perfectly his idea of poetry, while the tragedy of Mallarmé lies in the fact that he realized his idea of poetry to perfection.

Mais, hélas! Ici-Bas est Maître [1]

exclaimed Mallarmé; and he slowly climbed the steps which led to his ivory tower, clinging

a toutes les croisées,
D'où l'on tourne l'épaule à la vie . . . [2]

and at his desk, before his lamp, rejoined

Le ciel antérieur où fleurit la Beauté [3].

Fortunate Mallarmé! He achieved what Baudelaire had only *dreamed* of achieving, his art is "the tangible manifestation of the Idea", there is nothing in his work that is not graceful melancholy, pure desire and noble despair—the three postulates which Baudelaire's poetic art "borrowed" from Poe's *Poetic Principle.* "My mind moves in the Eternal," he wrote, "after having found nothingness, I have found the Beautiful." At the age of twenty-four Mallarmé had looked at nothingness and turned from it, he moved in Eternity. And until his death his chief difficulty was not to maintain himself there—for he had taken firm root!—but to "return" to earth: "Farewell, dear friend," he wrote Coppée, "I don't know whether I will see you again some day, *tuned to the key of things, returned.*" In a trice Mallarmé realized Spinoza's dream: to triumph over his *mode* and become *substance;* he experienced "the bliss of contemplating Eternity and feeling inner joy while alive." Could there be a more magnificent illustration of the Hegelian philo-

[1] *But alas! Here-Below is master*
[2] *to all the casement windows*
From which one turns his back to life . . .
[3] *The anterior heaven where Beauty flowers.*

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sophy which demands that "our wretched ego" be driven out of art? The wretched ego had indeed been ignominiously dismissed: "I am impersonal now, no longer the Stéphane you have known, but an aptitude of the spiritual universe to see and develop itself through what was once myself."

It would be impossible to do better in this genre! Mallarmé is no longer a man like others, "born marked for sin", he no longer runs the risk of being damned, he has erased in himself the very possibility of the original sin which Baudelaire dragged like a millstone around his neck—then why do we speak of his case as tragic? What more does a man need than to move in the Eternal? But cast a glance at Mallarmé's spiritual universe: it is not strong passions that dwell there, not even the absence of passions; boredom in this world is not long, intense and violent, as in Baudelaire's; the boredom here is gloomy and worn-out, that of a house not even haunted, without a ghost, without midnight, where emptiness sighs for a breeze, a log on the fire, a rustle of the curtains. There is never a throw of the dice in this world, not a cry, a surprise, a stress; never an Event. The lord of this manor has become a shadow; a happy one? that is what people say; but it is not what the poems say; an unhappy one? that neither. Nothing human can enter here, the Stéphane we have known has become tenuous, he has become eternal—like the dust on his books and the cobwebs in the corners. Nothing human—that was just what had been sought; but what ray of the "spiritual universe", which was supposed to replace what had been his "self", can be found here? Yes, to be sure

Tel qu'en lui-meme enfin l'éternité le change [4]

tells us again, in a magnificent line, that Mallarmé is moving within the Eternal. One might say—if lines of poetry could bring back life, that we have here, returned from among the dead, the great line in which Parmenides defined the One:

Même, dans le même demeurant, en soi-même il repose! [5]

This is the land of Identity, the great kingdom of Definition; no spring in this land dares burst forth lest it disturb the

[4] *Such as into himself at last eternity has changed him*
[5] *Same, in the same abiding, it rests in itself.*

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smoothness, lest it wrinkle the cloth of Nothingness; but it is not even this that Mallarmé means by "Eternity". Let us translate his line into bad prose: "such as he is, disburdened at last of his wretched self, the poet appears to posterity through his word alone." For it is posterity, nothing else, that Mallarmé understands by "Eternity". And now, if I put myself in Baudelaire's place

Je ne vois qu'infini par toutes les fenêtres,[6]

that is to say, the irreparable, the irremediable, the fascination of nothingness; it is not that the "same" is not to be found, it is right at the bottom, a figment of dream, both human and inhuman, for:

J'ai longtemps habité sous de vastes portiques[7]

In a forgotten corner of Mallarmé Eternity there sobs

L'aboli bibelot d'inanité sonore[8]

but Baudelaire takes his whole being thither, his wretched self and his "taste for the infinite." Even in Eternity he will need someone to plumb

Le secret douloureux qui me faisait languir[9]

This is not the place to explain how Baudelaire suggests, and how he *bungles*, the *tendency* that Mallarmé brought to its end: the attempt to expel from poetry that "cruel and humiliating maxim, *spiritus flat ubi vult.*" Nor do I wish to compare these two poets, as though two kinds of poetry were subject to comparison, as though what we grant the one must be subtracted from the other. I have always loved and still love Mallarmé, and I would not give the impression that I am ready to sacrifice him, that I would consent to erase his experience, or that I would want it to have been different. All I wish to establish here is that Mallarmé did not have to overcome nothingness; he never encountered it, he never knew what it was, his muse of golden words was never tempted, like the muse of Gérard de Nerval, to escape while uttering the cries of the Pythoness. There is not a trace of possession in Mallarmé's poetry; only the muse is there; Mallarmé's metaphysical des-

[6] *Through all the windows I see only the infinite*
[7] *I have lived a long time under vast porticoes.*
[8] *The abolished trinket of sonorous inanity*
[9] *The painful secret, cause of my lapse.*

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tiny is different, his poetic destiny is at the opposite pole from Baudelaire's. Shall we say that a captain who was never shipwrecked does not know the art of navigation? that a mariner who dies in his bed must be depised? Yet he who has been shipwrecked, who has felt the attraction of the disaster, *who perhaps even provoked it,* has so many more things to tell us! At the very moment that Eternity changes him into himself he discovers nothingness—the nothingness of precisely this "himself"—and of this Eternity. It is well to be able to flee such a *discovery!* I wish it to no one; for what is in question here is not an external catastrophe but a *mental* shipwreck. What solace in the quest for the Absolute, the Eternal! Even its anguish and madness are sweet. We desire this state of peace (or at least we think we do), and yet how hungry we are to know more about the ship wrecked on the reefs, particularly if it is one of the beautiful ships of the world, one that floated in Eternity, a ship named Baudelaire, Titanic, France or Civilization. This is not because we like the absurd; if it appears, if it conquers, we cry with Whitman:

Is only matter triumphant?

But we cannot endure an Eternity, we do not believe in it, if its skin is not marred with the scars of battle, its forehead with the gashes of shock. Mallarmé climbs up his tower and we follow him with stupefaction, but Baudelaire vainly tries to ascend his tower and turn his back to life: life runs after him, sits beside him at his desk, wrenches the pen from his hand and throws him into a revery, a daze verging on nothingness. This Here-Below for him is not stupidity, mediocrity, dirt, ugliness and disorder—sordid passengers of Nothing. It is not even the creditor or the boy from the newspaper waiting for his copy: it is all the entangled text of the contingent and the Eternal: disease, nightmare, remorse, hatred, anger, insomnia, the irretrievable, death:

Sur the fond de mes nuits, Dieu de son doigt savant
Dessine un cauchemar multiforme et sans trêve.[20]

How could he escape the immense army of ghosts he

[20] *On the background of my nights, God with cunning finger,*
Without respite draws a many-shaped nightmare.

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dragged after him, within him? What dike could he oppose to solid reality, which would be as solid as reality yet not of it? Art is likelier than anything, he wrote, to veil the terrors of the Abyss. From this it is clear that Baudelaire had greater *need* for art *than* Mallarmé. For this reason he tried to raise barriers less noble, less subtle than Mallarmé's, but firmer and more efficacious; and to contain the furious surges of the world outside, he drew them even inside his walls and lodged them there, tricking the pressures by actually borrowing their unevenness and instability and living in a perpetual see-saw—like a light-house keeper.

This explains T. S. Eliot's idea that Baudelaire's poetry contains much more *perishable* matter than that of great poets like Shakespeare and Dante; but there is no need to address oneself to the greatest: the fact is there is less perishable matter in Mallarmé's poetry than in Dante's. Yet it is by comparison with Dante that Eliot judges Baudelaire a *bungler*.[11] To be sure he thereby intends to point to what can be called Baudelaire's *eccentricity;* but shall I dwell on this? The biographers have stressed it sufficiently! his dandyism, Byronism, satanism have for a long time been flaunted for public curiosity; it would appear that he painted not only his hair but even his poems green; and his angers, his personal spites reached metaphysical proportions. And yet how difficult it is to reduce these aspects of him to an *attitude*, a *fashion*, borrowed and submitted to! Everything that touches Baudelaire, even what is least his own, is transformed by the contact and acquires the thickness of a profound personal event; he is the seat of a poetic and human experience so singular that everything combines to isolate him spiritually and morally, and to isolate him in such a way that it is impossible to distinguish that which is perishable among

[11] The reference is to T. S. Eliot's essay on Baudelaire (Collected Essays, p. 335). I am quoting the passages from which M. Fondane selects the words "perishable" and "bungler."

". . . *compare him with Dante and Shakespeare, for what such a comparison is worth, and he is found not only a much smaller poet, but one in whose work much more that is perishable has entered.*"

"*But in the adjustment of the natural to the spiritual, of the bestial to the human and the human to the supernatural, Baudelaire is a bungler compared to Dante; the best that can be said, and that is a very great deal, is that what he knew he found out for himself.*"—*Tr.*

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the elements composing his internal unity. It is at this point that Eliot goes astray: nothing contingent has entered Baudelaire's poetry; it is in his very deepest being, precisely insofar as changed by eternity, that Baudelaire is truly *ex-centric;* it is as essence that he is a *bungler;* he is never at his center, or at least his center is not in the middle, at an equal distance from any point on the circle. Thus to estimate the distance separating him from Dante one must resort to another criterion than the amount of perishable matter in their respective works; if only the center is real (and this is what Eliot thinks), then *the very criterion* of the poetry of Baudelaire is perishable, the very idea of a poetry without a center. But Eliot does not dare go that far; even when it is a question of Shakespeare he dodges the issue and ascribes the poet's "anarchy" to the philosophy of his time, to Montaigne, Seneca—in short to perishable elements which escaped control; Eliot is afraid to admit that there can be a great poetry which does not move within the Eternal, which is not centered on the Same; he is afraid to recognize that the Eternal can also be found in the *Other*, and that a Shakespeare or a Baudelaire, can, without being a bungler, be something besides "an aptitude of the spiritual universe to see and develop itself through what had once been himself", that such poets can be purely and simply the Shakespeare and Baudelaire we know, with their "wretched selves" intact.

It is true that at first sight Baudelaire's continual running after his center and constant complaint that he has lost it ("how, with so clear and distinct an idea of duty, does it come that I always do the opposite?"; his remarks about his "hateful reveries", etc., the assertions of his scorn for the motion which displaces lines), would seem to justify Eliot's idea that *this* is his aesthetic. The criminal is rarely on a level with his crime, says Nietzsche, and Baudelaire's aesthetic is seldom on a level with his poetry; he arrived at his real aesthetic only at the end of his life when he dismissed Joy from poetry and brought in Wretchedness, disproportion, deformity. But until to-day no one has wanted to take this aesthetic into account, people have always clung to the first, which, it is true, Baudelaire professed with

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much artful glibness, but which he betrayed at every step in his poetry. And it must be admitted that in forbidding himself to stand level with his crime Baudelaire is quasi-heroic; no one professed remorse, no one opposed *artifice* to reality, to the self, better than he, and since inspiration seemed to act only on his head, and since it *had* to come when he *desired*, he stimulated it by means of drugs; he whipped his *natural* laziness into work with stimulants; to chaos, to nightmare, he opposed order, peace, will; against monotony he employed surprise; to maintain the universe at its center he appealed to the Flogger, the Hangman. And when unable to formulate a reasonable profession of faith by his own efforts, he was ready to plagiarize, if necessary, the credo of the Poet's Poetic Principle. Never before have such audacity, such aggressiveness been used to assert—what? the most banal notion of the most banal aesthetic: exactly what art has always taught us, what philosophy has always taught. To life, to the wretched self, the poet and the philosopher have always opposed a universe of ideas, essences and forms—which they ended up, very simply, by taking for real life, and indeed for Eternity, while all the Mallarmés, Baudelaires and Shakespeares did their utmost to thin themselves out into vaporous webs, into matterless ghosts. But while Mallarmé succeeded, neither Shakespeare nor Baudelaire did: is this really a misfortune? and must we conceal their adventure, call them "bunglers" in order not to offend that Eternal in which Mallaramé moved? We have always believed that the poet had only to beat his wings to leave the earth and attain the *reality* of the Ideas—that his was his *mission*. Is it so catastrophic to learn that this is not the case at all, that we know nothing about the poet's "mission", that it may very well be there are several missions, indeed, one for each, and that to have or not to have a "center", to move or not to move within the Eternal, are only "external" criteria, which have nothing to do with poetry, seeing that poetry is free to take the direction it pleases without ceasing to be poetry, and great poetry at that? We like the poets who escape from reality—and why shouldn't we? But this does not entitle us to claim that those

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who do not escape, and precisely to the extent to which they do not escape, are "bunglers" who have consented to the perishable, as if we knew what poetry does or does not need, what it is and what it is not.

It so happens that Baudelaire's great novelty—the novelty of his poetry—lies in his very awareness that *escape is unreal;* and in his understanding of the artificial in all its *artificiality.* Unlike his critics he is not fooled by his most subtle stratagems; he knows that the *ways he proposes to us*—and imposes on us—lead him, at least, *nowhere.* And is not this the legacy he bequeathed Rimbaud, the Rimbaud whose leit-motif after each attempt at escape is the dejected awakening to failure:

Ce n'est rien; j'y suit, j'y suis toujours! [12]

On ne part pas! [13]

Or again: "I will get used to it. It will be the French life, the path of honor!"

Art, Baudelaire knew, he was the first to know it, is only *faking,* the best means we have, the instrument best suited for casting a veil over the terrors of the abyss. Neither Kant, Hegel nor Schopenhauer told us that. Very likely all three of them would have refused to accept a proposition which, without beating about the bush, proclaimed the *reality of the abyss.* But had they been forced to admit this (and no one has ever coerced philosophers into such an admission), they would at least have held that the veil, once cast over the abyss, was really efficacious, that the terrors were really dispelled, that the abyss no longer had anything to say. It would never have occurred to them that one should perhaps listen to the *objections* of the abyss, if indeed it had any, they could never have conceived that the abyss might be offended by a definition forever excluding it from the workings of art. What if the abyss did have something to say, something important, what if art were precisely its chosen language? But if this idea had occurred to them, all of them in complete agreement (and Baudelaire would doubtless have been of their opinion), would have decided that when the abyss and

[12] *It is nothing; I am here, I am still here!*
[13] *One never leaves!*

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its terrors talk, there cannot be, *and ought not to be*, art. Even if life exists (and the wretched self), *it must remain powerless to attain the concept*, it must not be able to bite at the Idea, not even at the "sensuous reflection of the Idea", as Hegel defined art. "This is in agreement with my principles", says Leibniz, "for *naturally* nothing enters our minds from the outside and we have a bad habit of thinking that our soul admits certain messengers as though it had doors and windows." So long as the "wretched self" moves within the Eternal, so long as it is a sensuous reflection of the Idea, it has neither doors nor windows; the abyss does not exist; nothing can enter from the outside. But the moment it *does* indeed enter with its train of perishable elements, we are in a mess: art must submit or resign.

I hope that after this brief analysis the reader will understand without difficulty why in Baudelaire the cult of art as Idea takes on *unique* proportions and density, why this cult so little resembles what has been called art for art's sake, and finally, why there is in this poet such a deep human resonance, such a bitter metaphysical savor. For Baudelaire, the cult of art for art's sake is not an escape, a facile flight, a completed purification of his wretched self (this is the meaning of catharsis), it is a terrible struggle undertaken without hope, without illusions, hence a desperate struggle, against the one thing he loathes and holds as *real*—the abyss! Upon the success or failure of this struggle depends not only Baudelaire's idea of art but also his idea of life and God. The triumph of the abyss, he thinks, would ruin not only his art, but also his life, exposed eternally as it would be to terrors which no veil could conceal any longer. But these things cannot be easily said: one is reluctant to tell them; they do not sound as well as "I am now impersonal . . . an aptitude of the spiritual universe . . . I am moving in the Eternal"; it is easier to be on a level with one's virtue than on a level with one's crime; and one would never confess this were it not that there is a law—an enigmatic law, to be sure—which does not permit any secret to remain buried. And Baudelaire reveals his own secret, without even being aware of the fact, in a sort of apology in code, in a code which he himself must have found rather hard to decipher.

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Among Baudelaire's numerous poetic themes there is one which he took directly from life; only later did he realize that it would make, just as it was, an excellent poem in prose. I refer to "The Poor Man's Toy," the theme of which Baudelaire cites purely as an illustration in his article "The Philosophy of the Toy", and which he reproduces almost word for word, but this time as a poem, in his *Le Spleen de Paris*. No doubt Baudelaire quotes this "anecdote" because of its significance, yet reading the poem we realize that the depth, the tragic *actuality* of its significance must have escaped him. But for this very reason it is all the more significant—*for us*. It illustrates in more than one respect the intentions, still obscure, of this essay:

"On a road, behind the fence of a large garden at the end of which emerged the white of a lovely castle shining in the sun, stood a handsome and rosy child. Luxury, freedom from care and the habitual view of wealth make these children so beautiful that one might think them cast in a different mold from the children of mediocrity and poverty.

"Beside him on the grass lay a splendid toy, as fresh as its owner, varnished, gilded, decked in purple and covered with plumes and trinkets. But the child was not interested in his favorite toy; that is what he was watching:

"On the other side of the fence, among the weeds and nettles of the road, was another child, filthy, sickly, slovenly, one of those parish urchins whose beauty would be discovered by an unbiased eye if, like the eye of the connoisseur, penetrating to the ideal painting under the varnish laid on by a tyro, it removed the repellent patina of poverty.

"Through the symbolic bars which separated two worlds, the highway and the castle, the poor brat was showing the elegant child his own toy, which the latter examined avidly as if it were some rare and unknown object. This toy, which the little sloven worried, poked and shook in a grated box, was a living rat! His parents, no doubt out of thrift, had snatched this toy from life itself. . . .

"And the two children laughed fraternally, displaying teeth of *equal* whiteness."

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A pretty fable, is it not? And one which implies no "moral", since the teeth of the two children are of *equal* whiteness! The bars separating the two worlds are only *symbolic,* as are the toys and the children. Hugo would have drawn an effective indictment against the children of the rich from this story, he would have demanded that society at once procure real toys for pariah urchins, he might even have undertaken a campaign for the extermination of rats in the countryside! But Baudelaire is still completely *dazed* by this vision; by an understandable impulse he identifies himself with the rich and rosy child—perhaps he believes himself to be this child—he drops his artificial top—and with *fascination* observes the strange new toy—the *living rat.* How often, throughout his life, his critical mind must have looked—with the same fascination—at the poems created by the other Baudelaire—the poet, the dreamer, the pariah urchin! How *terrible* is his toy! how dirty the child! Yet an "*unbiased eye would discover his beauty.*" But does it exist, this unbiased eye, which would see beauty—and not just filth—in this strange toy, which—out of thrift? out of wisdom?—the Abyss from time to time hands out to certain children of men—the *living rat?*

(Translated from the French by Lionel Abel)

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Writing in the Desert

Julian Symons

IN FRONT OF ME, covering a whole wall of the office, is a big board covered with grey cloth. On this grey cloth, held between stretches of white tape, are some hundreds of tickets with the names and numbers of the men in my Squadron. The tickets are variously coloured—pink for new recruits, pure white for potential officers, yellow for the permanent staff, blue for men earmarked for posting to special places, orange for men available for posting anywhere. The board has many subdivisions; one batch of tickets for one squad of men is kept separate from the next batch of tickets by the strips of tape. As the weeks pass tickets are moved across the board from left to right, the colour of the tickets is changed as men become potential officers, potential instructors or merely available for posting. The board shows in a moment the location of any man in the squadron, the men in detention, the men on leave, the men in hospital. To be responsible for it, to move the tickets along and finally tear them up when men are posted away from here, is to feel disturbingly the sensation of power: it is as though one were the chief character in a Kafka story. The weak winter sun shines through the window in the afternoon, altering slightly the tickets' colour.

Another wall of the office is taken up by three large windows. Outside these windows appears the desolation of our camp; to the left new roads being built, immediately in front of the football pitch and the gaunt yellow posts for basketball; the huts in which we live, long and low, atrocities in dark stone; a little further away the officers' mess, equally ugly but made of red brick; in the distance the trackpins of the tanks glitter as they crawl up to the moors. The whole scene is full of symbolism: but like so much that is obviously symbolic, it will bear many interpretations . . .

It is quite true that serving soldiers know less of the conduct and progress of the war than do most civilians. It is not possible to think that this discouragement of independent, and especially generalized, discussion, is fortuitous: it is part of an always implied and sometimes expressed belief of the army authorities that a good soldier is as much as possible a specialist and as little as possible an intelligent human being. Discipline is made as nearly as may be *automatic;* one obeys orders which are essentially non-logical. Discussion of the war in official ABCA talks is restricted to such subjects as the extent of German war guilt, surveys of the Eighth Army's campaign or of the resources of Latin America: there is positive depreciation of any attempt to discuss the nature of Fascism and why we should fight it, the possible growth of

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Fascism in England, the economic causes of the war. *The war,* generally, is not taboo, but it is neglected: something much less important than the Sergeant Major's voice.

And, living this monastic life under the Sergeant Major's shadow, one is startled by the scraps of culture that arrive, as unexpected as sunshine, with their news of the war and of ideas. The examination one makes of them is more than normally close and exact; and everything is seen through the distorting, simplifying lenses of this world where the act of independent thought is itself an effort, and almost dangerous. Reading PARTISAN REVIEW, making these notes about literature and the war and myself, I think "What would the Sergeant Major say?" And I know the answer.

Of Crisis and Dismay

"Now in this hour of crisis and dismay"
wrote Auden to Isherwood
"What better than your strict and adult pen
Can warn us from the colours and the consolations"

Excellent and appropriate words: but written in 1937, five or three years too soon. The hour of crisis and dismay is on us all: where are the writers who told us about it in advance? It is too clear from Auden's literary history, and from Isherwood's, that they have not been warned from the colours and the consolations, or not from all of them. The best view of Auden's later poetry that I have read is a very brilliant and sympathetic article by Randall Jarrell in *The Southern Review.* It says, I think, almost all there is to be said about Auden after 1937: a depressing story. A great deal, certainly, remains, and among it the best poetry of our time. "Our Auden never writes anything else worth reading", Geoffrey Grigson said to me, looking with serious owlishness through his horn rims, "We have something that will always be valuable." And so we have. But reading Auden's work now, all the elaborate dead notes in *New Year Letter,* even such little things as the review of Miss Bogan in PARTISAN REVIEW: "But the escape from the Self without the surrender of the Self is, of course, an illusion", one thinks: Ah, those capital letters, what desperation they convey. How much we were mistaken who saw in Auden a poetic rationalist, when what we have is only another "sport" of genius. *Something that will always be valuable,* yes: but we hoped for so much more.

* * * * *

A talent for literature takes many shapes: but always a shape cut to the social pattern of the time. What is the "development" of Auden, MacNeice, Day Lewis, but an attempt of the petty-bourgeois to free himself from his environment? Does this seem too mean a view? Auden: in 1931 he wrote "A Communist to Others"; in 1937 the same poem was published without a title and with the ending cut; in 1943 he is in America, and his poetic voice sounds odder and odder. Day Lewis, MacNeice: the names are equal to Book Society, BBC. These poets have

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succumbed to the voice which says, at two extremes: Express yourself, be dotty; or Shall I write better because I am a rebel against society as it is constituted, because I make less money? In MacNeice the struggle is less marked than in the others, the "attitude" most powerfully conveyed in his work is that of the petty bourgeois making a dignified stand in the face of a doom almost equally accepted and feared ("We cannot ask for pardon"). The collapse is therefore less obvious. In Spender, more comically or tragically honest than the other three, the struggle still goes on: frequently with "results" which are transparently theatrical, sometimes more happily.

* * * * *

The matter of *technique.* There is a great deal of work to be done in the association of technical literary innovations with material social facts. If we consider, for instance, Joyce's literary progress, as I think we must, primarily as an indication of the path taken by one writer of "genius" picking his way along the slippery roads of capitalism, solving social problems in his art by avoiding them, hiding from himself the true face of *society* behind the deceitful mask of *life,* what value shall we place on Joyce's technical innovations? Similarly, what is the relation between the technical innovations of Auden and the "new world" hinted at more or less hopefully in his early poems? Or between the increasing impersonality of Isherwood's writing and his increasing wariness in expressing any intelligible opinion about art or society?

To these questions there is no easy or didactic answer. Until criticism is more nearly an exact craft, one can work only by analysis and comparison. It is obvious, in the case of Auden, that there is some reason more than simple choice for the clipped, elliptic utterance of the early *Poems;* if we do not believe in some variety of "art for art's sake" we shall also agree that as art is a social phenomenon, every change in art and language has a social basis. I wish to indicate here only briefly the *conclusions* reached in Auden's case by a close analysis of technique and subject. Such conclusions are bound to seem didactic; I will try to make them as little so as possible.

The reaction from Eliot expressed in *Poems* is chiefly one of language: as I have said, the attempt of the petty-bourgeois to free himself from environment, move to the Left: an attempt expressed characteristically enough, not in action but in terms of choice of subject, manner of expression, etc. The tone is as martial as possible, the speech that of the parade ground or public school: violent, satiric, warnings for the future. But the speech is noticeably indirect, because Auden is himself involved in the satire: it is *himself* he is attacking as much as a decaying social order; he is seen dimly among those who are "Sleeping with people and playing fives", he is at once the "healer" and the pathic who is to be healed. This is one reason for the ambiguity of the early poems and the form that ambiguity takes.

The progress towards a simplicity of style which is shown through the oddity and confusion of *The Orators* and the crudeness of *The Dance of Death,* reaches a peak point in *Look, Stranger,* published in 1937 (though some of the poems were written much earlier). The writing

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has become smooth, the voice is no longer the sergeant major's, the definite article is back in use. Few poems in *Look, Stranger* contain difficulties of syntax or diction: most of them express the knowledge that "What by nature and by training, We loved has little strength remaining", the attempt

"To think no thought but ours,
To hunger, work illegally, and be anonymous"

at war with the idea and fact of *love*, which is seen as something fascinating, dangerous, and (almost) wrong. ("The voice I hear and wish I did not"). One cannot be less than sympathetic to the effort in these poems to link the two worlds, the outer world of political effort and the inner one of private virtue and affection. This was the time of the Spanish Civil War, the Popular Front, of manifestos and protestations: the time when petty-bourgeois writers were able most nearly to approach a progressive, not purely detached, social position. But "love", which represents always the private life, stands in the way; and the opposition between love and necessary action is, for Auden and his friends, not at all an absurd one.

The increase of directness in *Look, Stranger* is made at a cost: there is a lessening of power and incisiveness, a disturbing vagueness in some poems; and the prevailing tone is still, after all, that of one intellectual to another:

"The creepered wall stands up to hide
The gathering multitude outside
Whose darkness hunger worsens,
Concealing from their wretchedness
Our metaphysical distress,
Our kindness to ten persons."

The distress *is* metaphysical, not fully realized: if it were fully realized it could not be expressed in such terms.

Look, Stranger is Auden's turning point. In the years following, up to the present time, there are some fine poems, particularly the thirty sonnets at the end of *Journey to a War;* but generally there is an increasing looseness and foggy idealism of thought, expressed by frequent use of capital letters ("An Elk's Congress of the capital letters": Mr. Jarrell) to convey things which are intangible, or Too Big To Be Said. A failure of technique keeps pace nicely with the collapse of thought; similes become mechanical or abstract, the necessary avoidance of the "poetic" ends in bad prose (see the poem on Freud). Everywhere an inability to come to terms with the real world going on outside is expressed by a disintegration and slackness in the form of the verse. Mr. Jarrell has described the process in detail in his *Southern Review* article: it has been a process distressing to watch.

A "*Fascism of the Intellectuals*"

This equivocal English air has still a faint smell of nineteenth-century Liberalism; the ghost of parliamentary power hangs about us,

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the shadow of the Grand Old Man waits on Churchill's round face and empty phrases: we live even now anachronistic lives under a regime that grants more individual liberty than it can afford. In such soil, out of such weakness in the state, there is likely to spring a *Fascism of the intellectuals*, remote from a mass basis, expressive chiefly of a deep emotional discontent with the pattern of the intellectuals' own lives. It is the germ of this emotional discontent that permits the ideas of the Duke of Bedford to find more or less sympathetic consideration in some English magazines. English individualist intellectuals welcome any writing, whatever its nature, that seems to promise them a future that is not shadowed by an authoritarian Communism; and the fact that they appear side by side with professed Fascist sympathisers does not worry them; they would appear side by side with Communists too, but the Communists won't let them!

The English intellectuals' movement towards Fascism presents itself in many forms, all of which profess an extreme anti-rational point of view: a dotty mysticism, belief in the "reality of life", "belief", even, in the soil or the soul. It would not be just or appropriate to mention names: but it will be obvious* that a conscious exaltation of the power of myth, a deliberate obsession with the "romantic" and religious as opposed to the reasonable and logical, *any* victory of rhetoric over good sense, is finally a score for reaction. But this movement towards Fascism is by its very nature vague and unclear, its protagonists are agreed only in their anti-rationalism. (What is called in PARTISAN REVIEW "The New Failure of Nerve" applies perfectly to the English intellectual scene.) There is no such technical approach to Fascism here as is made in James Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution.* It is typical of our liberal (but still anti-rational) intellectuals that they should applaud the intelligence of Burnham's book and totally fail to realize its implications: for there is one step only between thinking, as Burnham does now, that the managerial revolution is regrettable but inevitable, and thinking that it is inevitable and therefore desirable; and it will require an inhuman detachment on Burnham's part not to take that step towards Fascism. Fascism: for German Fascism is (if we accept Burnham's thesis) one form that the managerial state may take: but it can take no form that is not totalitarian and that will not worsen the living conditions of men in the countries where it comes to power. Burnham's case is a sad one: that a man with so much vigour and intelligence should move from a Marxist position to one in which a totalitarian regime is regarded as "inevitable" leaves one with the gloomiest reflections. The sudden abnegation of responsibility in the assumption that men cannot or will not make any collective movement to avoid their Fate is shocking: English intellectuals, as they have never committed themselves as far as Burnham, as indeed many of them have never committed themselves at all, have no such responsibility to deny, no problem to solve. They do

*It must be understood that I do not claim to speak "objectively": "obvious" to people who start from my premises.

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not need to make a rational approach to Fascism: when the time comes, they will accept it emotionally.

* * * * *

This is a sweeping statement: but there are moments in history (and these few years are such a moment) when paths are sharply defined and clear, and wavering inexcusable. There are times when it is good for many artists to remain detached from politics, in the sense that if they were not detached from politics they would not be artists at all: but the present is not such a time. There are times when an artist's social ideas are not of first importance, when they do not touch vitally his art: this is true of some artists today and in the past, but although we value what they have written and may write, they can look forward only to a future of diminishing artistic returns. There are times when it will seem essential to most artists to state clearly on which side of the fence they stand: and in England and America we live, or we soon shall live, in such a time. The consequences for the artist of such a statement are profound, and they may end in the abasement or the abandonment of his art. Abasement: for to accept *what is*, and try to preserve your own virtue in an evil world, is at best sharply to narrow the range of your writing, to cut yourself off from everything but the circle of personal experience; at worst to become a paid servant of the State, retaining no independence of thought or action. Abandonment: for if we stand on the side of "progress" we may find it necessary (as William Morris suspected) to resign art altogether. We shall be dissatisfied with the art we produce as members, however unwilling, of bourgeois society: and a Socialist art, we may feel, must be preceded by a Socialist society.

In Our Time

What is to be done? may then be asked. Is there no hope, some people will want to know, for writers either progressive or reactionary? And would not the artist be better employed in the practice of his art, worrying as little as possible about this dubious "fence" over which he is to be compelled in the near future, you tell us, to cock a leg? Is not the production of creative work an artists's peculiar function? And do not, the same people might go on, do not the views you are expressing show a contempt for creative work, are you not making *art itself* the bumboy of a political attitude? There are hundreds of similar questions: the reader can think up a few of his own.

Such questions are equally banal, disgusting and ridiculous. They are based on a view of existence that separates the artist's work from his life and so from his place in society, that regards "art" as some sort of quintessential virtue (the "best part" of a man, we hear it said, comes out in his art); the artist is regarded at once as a "personality", and yet by a paradox that is not in fact at all surprising, as a vehicle that produces works of art rather than as a human being. This concern for "art" or "literature" as an essence, the idea that we must ***keep art***

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going, cannot be considered less than disgusting. It is rooted in a belle-lettrism which we all share, more or less, as an unhappy heritage from the nineteenth century. All: it is such a belle-lettrism that permits the editors of PARTISAN REVIEW, who do not regard art as a sorcerer's trick, to become uneasy bed brothers across the Atlantic with the editor of the quite frankly belle-lettrist *Horizon*, who prints odd fag-ends of the twenties, autobiographical chatter by Augustus John, an occasional good story or poem, bound together by no organized view of life or society, no stronger thread than his own erratic intelligence and whimsical Barriesque good taste. Before the war PARTISAN REVIEW, "a magazine of literature and Marxism", pursued a path well-marked and clear, far remote from the modish *Horizon* highway. Even now PR is our sharpest and most intelligent literary magazine; *Horizon* would flinch still at printing many of PR's articles: but there is a noticeable difference, a softening, as it were, of the editors' attitude; concessions, less admissible in wartime than in time of peace, are made, the forces of reaction admitted. And this is done, overtly or not, in the name of keeping art (or "independent" thought) *going*. But going where?

* * * * *

Perhaps this is harsher than is necessary. I do not mean to imply that PR should shut up shop; but I do mean that, as the pressure of events drove Burnham away from Marxism to an unwilling formulation of a "new" type of society, so PARTISAN REVIEW has been driven to compromise more and more with the petty bourgeoisie who have produced the characteristic art of our time. The compromise was inevitable, and will continue: the editors of PARTISAN REVIEW may say, quite truly, that there is *nothing else to print*.

But it is still obvious that the writers of the thirties might make now a much more respectable and dignified showing, both in their past, present and likely future, than they do. The highest kind of creative work likely to be produced today will be satiric: taking as its basis the visible world and commenting on it with a violence of satire. Such work might be realistic or fantastic in manner: Rex Warner's *The Wild Goose Chase* in which the influence of Kafka is used deliberately for a social end, was a hint of what might be done; *The Orators* was another hint. But those were hints merely: what book written in English in the last ten years can compare, on its own ground, with Bert Brecht's *A Penny For the Poor?* It remains true that

> These times require a tongue that naked goes
> Without more fuss than Dryden's or Defoe's.

The times call out for bitterness, for a comment on our society such as Jonson was able to make on the Elizabethan, a cartoon as comprehensive and sane as Jonson's of the world we live in. But from the old-stagers, the established and the promising writers of five years ago we get simply a retreat into the hinterland of the mind, a preoccupation with one or another abstraction, or more simply, silence; while their juniors are vocal in reaction. Instead of sanity we face a deliberate cult of the irrational, far more disturbing and less useful than the destructive irrationality of Dada and Surrealism: a view of life which is *constructed*

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on an anti-scientific and myth-worshipping basis (the power of love as super-real, the power of God justifying our existence, etc.). That PARTISAN REVIEW, which is awake to the "failure of nerve" as it is expressed by scientists, theologians and historians, is more innocent when the failure of nerve is related to art and letters is well shown in a recent review by Mr. Greenberg, one of the magazine's editors, of some of these writers. After mentioning "know-nothingism and reversionary aesthetics" (what are *reversionary* aesthetics?) he goes on to say that "their verse . . . manages to have a great amount of existence"(!) . . . "Nicholas Moore, whose "Little Black Box" is one of the most original poems of our age, doing better in twenty-nine lines what otherwise only a novel can do" . . . "To have shown that it is still possible to write convincingly such nice derivative verse is a kind of triumph." What kind of triumph? The kind of triumph the Georgians achieved? And what is the mysterious *something* that only Mr. Moore's poem and a novel can do? God, and Mr. Greenberg, knows. And "I share the premonitions of a poetic renaissance which", etc. Poetry continually changes: Mr. Greenberg, although he considers "the tendency" these poets "embody" is "regrettable", confuses change with renaissance. Mr. Greenberg's cautious obscurantism is an unconscious endeavor to deny the fact that we are in the middle of a reaction: there can be no renaissance of this sort, in England or America, today. The "personal note", the "traditional simplicity" may promise something, though not a renaissance, from the middle-aged or the no longer young: in the young they spell in red letters, certainly, DANGER.

* * * * *

A society gets the art it deserves. It is pointless to blame petty-bourgeois intellectuals for not producing a socially radical art: we shall have no Socialist art before we have a Socialist society and perhaps not then: for the *art of the mass* may be something very different from the art of the isolated, and by nature anarchistic, individual: it make take forms that we do not recognize as "art" at all.

But we are alive here, and now: and if we do not raise the ragged cloak of "the artist" to shrug round our shoulders, if we believe only in the visible, material world, and see ourselves clearly in it as individuals in a world at war, the chief problem we face is how to reconcile our daily living and thinking with the production of creative work at all. Too many writers have solved this problem by giving their allegiance to one or another crackpot idea, a mystical view of human life that provides alleviation of the present through a mythical past or future. It is with equal astonishment and horror that we see our betters of yesterday, ignoring all responsibility for their words and actions of a few years ago, gaily rolling down the slippery slope of belief in public religion or private myth: the best hope for art in our time is that some of us can stay sane.

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that you shouldn't be able to see it." "I came here to talk to you about a job, not to see you throw a fit," he said.

"It's the principle of the thing," I replied. "It seems to escape you. Simply because I am no longer a member of their party they have instructed him and boobs like him not to talk to me. Don't you see what's involved? I have a right to be spoken to. It's the most elementary thing in the world. Forbid one man to talk to another, forbid him to communicate with another and you forbid him to think. And there's the end of human freedom and the beginning of tyranny." "Come, come," said Myron. "You're making too much fuss over it." "I should be making twice as much fuss," I said. "It's very important." "But you've been through with them for years, haven't you?" Myron asked. "Do you mean to say you've just discovered this?" "I haven't forgotten, that's all. I haven't forgotten that I once believed these people were devoted to the service of some grand flapdoodle, the Race, *le genre humain*. Oh yes, they were! By the time I got out I realized that any hospital nurse did more for *le genre humain* with one bedpan than they did with their entire organization. In those days they used to pound into us the futility of 'reformism'. About a month after we parted company I sat down and wrote a letter of apology to Jane Addams."

"Did you?" he said looking at me curiously. "I never mailed it," I said. "Maybe I should have. Don't you believe me?" "Why shouldn't I?" "I changed my mind about redoing the world from top to bottom a la Karl Marx and decided in favor of bandaging a few of its sores at a time a la Jane Addams. Of course, that was temporary, too . . ." "Was it?" he said. "You know that, Mike," I said loudly.

The man who was sitting with Burns turned round but the latter still pretended not to see me. "That's right," I said. "Look the other way. That boy is mad, Myron. He's never been sane. He sticks, how he sticks. Everything is just as it used to be. He still wears that proletarian bang and dreams of becoming an American Robespierre. The rest have compromised themselves to the ears, but *he* still believes in the revolution. Blood will run, power will change hands and then the state will wither away according to in-ex-orable logic. I'd gamble my shirt on it. Let me tell you something about him. Do you know what he used to have in his room? I went up with him one day and there was a large scale map of the city, with pins in it. So I said, 'What's this for, Jim?' And then—I swear this is true—he started to explain that he was preparing a guide for street fighting the day of the insurrection. He had all the critical streets marked in code for cellars and roofs, kinds of paving, how many news stands there were on each corner and whether they could be thrown

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into barricades. Even abandoned sewers for hiding arms. He traced them through the City Hall records. At that time I didn't know how crazy it was. But I'm willing to bet he still has that map. He's an addict. They're all addicted people, Mike. Hey, Burns! Hey!" I called out.

"Shut up, Joseph! for God's sake. What are you doing? Everybody is looking at you."

Burns glanced briefly in my direction and then resumed his conversation with the other man who, however, turned again to look at me.

"What do you know about that! I can't arouse him. He won't give me a tumble. I'm just gone—fssst!" I snapped my fingers. "I'm a contemptible petty-bourgeois renegade, and could anything be worse. That idiot! Hey, addict!" I shouted.

"Have you gone mad? Come on." Myron pushed back the table. "I'm going to get you out of here before you start a fight. Where's your coat, which is it? Why, you're a madman, come back here!" But I was already out of his reach. I halted squarely before Burns.

"I said hello to you before, didn't you notice?"

He made no reply.

"Don't you know me? It seems to me I know you very well Answer me, don't you know who I am?"

"Yes, I know you," replied Burns in a low voice.

"That's what I wanted to hear," I said. "I just wanted to be sure. I'm coming Myron." I pulled my arm away from him and we strode out.

I was aware that this had made a bad impression on Myron but cared to do little to rectify it beyond saying briefly that I was not myself lately.

Dec. 26

I seem to be unable to stay out of trouble. Disgraced myself at my brother's house last night. I can take it lightly, but Iva feels it very keenly.

My brother Amos, who is my senior by twelve years, is a wealthy man. He began his career as a messenger on the Exchange and before he was twenty-five had become a member of that body with a seat of his own. The family is very proud of him and he, in turn, has been a reliable son, very much alive to his duties. Toward me he early took a protective attitude but he soon gave up, confessing that he did not know what I was after. He was hurt when I became a radical, relieved when he assured himself I was one no longer. He was disappointed when I married Iva. His own wife, Dolly, had a rich father. He had

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urged me to follow his example and marry a wealthy woman. He was even more disappointed when, instead of accepting the position he offered me in his business, I took what to him seemed a menial job at Inter American. He called me a fool, and for nearly a year we did not see each other. Then he and Iva arranged a reconciliation. We have been on fairly good terms since, however strange he thinks my choice of occupation and my ways. He tries not to disapprove of me too openly; but he has never learned that I resent his way of questioning me when we meet. He is often tactless and sometimes rude. For some reason, he has not been able to accept the fact that it is possible for a member of his family to live on so little. "Haven't they given you a raise yet? How much are you making? Well, do you need money?" I have never accepted any.

Now that I have been out of work since May, he has become more pressing. Several times he has sent me checks for large amounts which I have returned immediately. The last time this happened he said, "*I'd* take it, by golly. *I* wouldn't be so proud and stiff-necked. Oh, no, not brother Amos. Someday you just try offering me money and see if I pass it up." A month ago when we visited him (he invites us for meals frequently thinking, presumably, that we do not get enough to eat) he made such a scene when I refused to take some clothes he was thrusting on me that Iva at last whispered pleadingly, "Take it, Joseph, take the stuff!" and I gave in.

Dolly, my sister-in-law, is a pretty woman, still slender, large bosomed, but attractively so, dark, with fine hair combed upward in a way designed to make the most of her neck. She has a very graceful neck; I have always admired it. It is one of the traits my fifteen-year-old niece Etta has inherited. To me it has always been one of the exquisite characteristics of feminity; I can well understand why it provoked the prophet Isaiah to utter the words: "Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with stretched forth necks, walking and mincing as they go and making a tinkling with their feet, therefore will the Lord smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion and the Lord will discover their secret parts." It astonishes me that the same association should be in both our minds, though with a different cast. Certainly it is the "stretched forth necks" or delicacy in conjunction with the rugged ancient machinery of procreation that have for a long time been identified in my imagination with feminine nature. Here the parallel ends, for I am the very opposite of vindictive in regard to this duality and have, indeed, found pleasure in recognizing it.

My niece and I are not on good terms; there is a long-standing antagonism between us. Ours was not a rich family. Amos tells frequently how he struggled, how badly he was dressed as a boy, how little my father could give him. And he and Dolly have brought Etta

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up to identify poverty not so much with evil as with unimportance, to feel that she, the daughter of a wealthy man is worlds apart from those who live in low distinction, drably, in ill furnished flats, without servants, who wear inferior clothing and have so little pride as to be debtors. She prefers her mother's people. Her cousins have automobiles and summer homes. I am in no way a credit to her.

In spite of our antagonism I had until lately tried to influence the girl, sending her books and, on her birthday, record albums. I knew I could have little effect on her. But when she was twelve I undertook to tutor her in French as a means of broaching other subjects. (Her father, naturally, wanted her to be accomplished.) I was unsuccessful. My missionary eagerness betrayed itself too soon, before I had her confidence. She told her mother that I was teaching her "bad things". And how was I to explain to Dolly that I was trying to "save" Etta? It would have been insulting. Etta hated the lessons, by simple extension she hated me, and if I had not given her an excuse for discontinuing them she would soon have found one.

Etta is a vain girl. I am sure she spends a great many hours before the mirror. I am sure, also, that she must be aware of the resemblance she bears to me. It goes beyond the obvious similarities pointed out by the family. Our eyes are exactly alike and so are our mouths and even the shape of our ears, sharp and small—Dolly's are altogether different. And there are others, less easily definable, which she cannot help recognizing and which—our enmity being what it is—must be painful to her.

At dinner the talk, in which I scarcely took part at first, was of the hardships of rationing. Dolly and Amos are coffee drinkers but, as patriots, they tempered their complaints with resignation. They turned next to shoes and clothing. Dolly's brother Loren who represents a large Eastern shoe firm had warned them that the government intended to limit the sale of leather goods.

"We couldn't get along on four pairs a year," said Dolly.

But that was unpatriotic, wasn't it? The contradiction was too plain to be unnoticed.

"You have to take into account what people are accustomed to," said Amos, "their standard of living. The government overlooks that. Why, even charities don't give the same amounts to any two families. It would cause too much hardship." "Yes, that's what I meant," said Dolly. "You couldn't call it hoarding." "No," I replied. She had addressed herself to me. "Later on there'll be a run on clothes, too," asserted Amos. "That's the way the consumer market is when people are earning." "Of course, Joseph won't have to worry. The Army will take care of him. But we poor civilians. . . ."

"Joseph would be indifferent anyway," said Iva. "It wouldn't affect him. He never buys more than one pair of shoes a year."

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"He isn't on his feet much," said Etta. Her mother gave her a sharp look. "I do lead a sedentary life," I said. "That was all I meant, mother," said Etta. "He doesn't worry about any of those things too much, was what I meant," Iva continued, speaking quickly. "He doesn't particularly care what he eats, either, just so it's food. It was no problem pleasing him when I used to cook." "It's a blessing to be that way. Amos is so hard to suit. You wouldn't think they were brought up by the same mother." "He wasn't so easy to raise in all respects," Amos said with a smile across the table.

"When are you going into the Army, Joseph," asked Etta. "Now, Etta," said Amos reprovingly. "*Uncle* Joseph, I'm sorry. When are you going?" "I don't know. Whenever God wills." This amused them. "He's certainly taking His time about it," said Dolly. "There's no hurry," Iva interposed. "The longer the better." "Oh, of course," Dolly said, "I know how you feel." "But Joseph doesn't feel that way about it, do you Joseph?" Amos looked pleasantly at me. "I'm sure he'd like to find out how to hurry Him up. It isn't only the waiting, but he'll miss out on his chances for advancement. He ought to get in there and become an Officers' Candidate."

"I don't think I want to try to make an officer of myself." "Well, I don't see why not," said Amos. "Why not?" "As I see it the whole war's a misfortune. I don't want to raise myself through it." "But there have to be officers. Do you want to sit back and let some cluck do what you can do a thousand times better?" "I'm used to that," I said, shrugging. "That's the case in many departments of life already. The Army's no exception." "Iva, do you intend to let him go in with that attitude? A fine Army we'd have." "It's my conviction," I said. "Iva couldn't change it and I'm inclined to think she wouldn't want to. Many men carry their ambitions over from civilian life and don't mind climbing upon the backs of the dead, so to speak. It's no disgrace to be a private, you know. Socrates was a plain foot-soldier, a hoplite." "Socrates, eh?" said Amos. Well that's a good and a sufficient reason."

A little later in the evening Amos, calling me aside, led me up to his bedroom and there, producing a hundred dollar bill, thrust it like a handkerchief into my breast pocket, saying, "This is our Christmas present to you."

"Thank you," I said pulling it out and laying it on the dresser, "but I can't take it." "Why can't you take it? Nonsense, you can't refuse it. I tell you it's a present." He picked it up impatiently. "Be a little more hard headed, will you? You're always up in the air. Do you know what I paid in income taxes alone, last year? No? Well, this isn't a drop in that bucket. I'm not depriving myself of anything to give it to you." "But what will I do with it, Amos? I don't need it." "You are the most obstinate jackass I've ever seen. You can't

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stand being helped even a little, by anyone." "Why, this is your shirt I'm wearing, and these are your socks. I appreciate them, but I don't want anything else."

"Joseph!" he exclaimed. "I don't know what to do with you. I'm beginning to think you're not all there with your convictions and your hop—! I wish I knew how it was going to turn out with you. You'll ruin yourself in the end. Think of Iva, sometimes, What's her future going to be like?" "Oh, the future." "That's what I said." "Well, who the devil has one?" "Everyone," Amos said. "I have." "Well, you're in luck. I'd think about it a little, if I were you. There are many people, perhaps hundreds of thousands, who have had to give up all thought of future. There is no personal future any more. That's why I can only laugh at you when you tell me to look out for mine in the Army, in that tragedy. I wouldn't stake a pin on my future. And maybe I wouldn't have yours. . . ." Toward the end my voice had begun to shake. Amos faced me quietly for a while. Then he said, "Take the money, Joseph," and left. I heard him going downstairs.

I sat on the bed groggily holding my head. There was a weak lamp burning in the corner; from its copper slot one band of light crossed the curtain; the rest of the room was nearly dark. The ceiling had become a screen for the accidental motions of the greenish street beyond, and across half its width was thrown intact a reflection of the venetian blind, like the ribs of some immemorial fish. What sort of impression had my words made on Amos? It was impossible to tell. What could he think? Perhaps he considered me more hopeless than ever. But what did *I* think? Was what I had said half as true as it was impetuous? His neat vision of personal safety I disowned? but not a future of another kind. Still, how could I reason with him. He was a distance beyond reckoning from the craters of the spirit, so that they were no more than small pits on his horizon. But in time they would draw closer. Yes, everyone came to face them, I thought, when those horizons shrank, as they could not fail to shrink. I went to the bathroom and washed. The crammed feeling at my heart began to wear off and when I hung the towel back on its glass rod I was less confused. I picked up the hundred dollar bill from the dusk of the carpet where it had fallen. If I tried to hand it back now there would be a scene; I knew better than to try. I searched the top of Amos's dresser for a pin or clasp of some kind. Not finding one there I opened one drawer after another until, in Dolly's dressing table, I came upon a pincushion. I went to the bed and stuck the bill to the counterpane over the pillow. Then, in the hall, I stood a few seconds hearing the husky voice of the radio speaker below and the comment and laughter of the others. I decided not to join them.

Instead, though I knew it meant working a hardship on Iva to

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leave her to Dolly, Etta and Amos, I climbed to the third floor. There, in what had once been an attic, Dolly had furnished a music room. One entire side of it was taken up by a large monster of a piano which crouched on bowed legs, awaiting use. It was, however, seldom touched, for it had been replaced downstairs by a more jaunty and stylish instrument that showed its teeth like a darky entertainer. On the opposite side there was a phonograph with a shelf of albums above it. I began to look for a record I had bought Etta a year ago, a Haydn divertimento for the cello played by Feuerman. To find it I had to hunt through half a dozen albums. Here Dolly and Etta for all their sense of property were careless; there were numerous broken records. But I found mine whole and, thankfully,—my dejection would have doubled if I had found it cracked—I started it and sat down facing the piano.

It was the first movement, the adagio, that I cared most about. Its sober opening notes, preliminaries to a thoughtful confession, showed me that I was still an apprentice in suffering and humiliation. I had not even begun. I had, furthermore, no right to expect to avoid them. So much was immediately clear. Surely, no one could plead for exception; that was not a human privilege. What I should do with them, how to meet them, was answered in the second declaration with grace, without meanness. And though I could not as yet apply this answer to myself I recognized its rightness and was moved by it vehemently. Not until I was myself a whole man could it be my answer, too. And was I to become this whole man alone, without aid? I was too weak for it, I did not command the will. Then in what quarter should I look for help, where was the power? Grace by what law, under what order, by whom required? Personal, human or universal, was it? The music named only one source, the universal one, God. But what a miserable surrender that would be, born of disheartenment and chaos; and out of fear, bodily and imperious, that like a disease asked for a remedy and did not care how it was supplied. The record came to an end: I began it again. No, not God, not any divinity. That was an anterior, not of my own deriving. I was not so full of pride that I could not accept the existence of something greater than myself, something, perhaps, of which I was an idea, or merely a fraction of an idea. That was not it. But I did not want to catch at any contrivance in panic. In my eyes, that was a great crime. Granted the answer I was hearing that went so easily to the least penetrable part of me, the seldom disturbed thickets around the heart, was made by a religious man. But was there no way to attain that answer other than to sacrifice the mind that sought to be satisfied? From the very antidote another disease would spring. It was not a new matter, it was one I had frequently considered. But not with such a desperate emotion or

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such crucial necessity. Or such a feeling of loneliness. For I had no help in answering. Out of my single strength it was necessary for me to return the verdict for reason, in its partial inadequacy, and against the advantagkes of its surrender.

As I began to play the record for the third time, Etta came into the room. Without speaking to me, she went to the shelf and, taking down a brightly colored album, waited, an impatient frown on that fresher and somewhat harder or unworked version of my own face. I now scarcely heard the music. I was already braced for a struggle the inevitability of which I recognized at once. I groped inside the cabinet of the phonograph for the lever. "Just a minute. What are you doing?" she said coming forward a step. I turned with an aggressive movement. "What?" I said. "I want to use the machine, Joseph." "I'm not finished with it yet." I don't care," she insisted. "You've had it to yourself all this time. It's my turn. You've been playing that thing over and over." "You snooped, didn't you," I said accusingly. "I did not. It was so loud everybody heard it downstairs." "Well, you'll have to wait, Etta." "I will not," she said. "I want to play these Cugat records mamma gave me. I've been wanting to hear them all day." I did not step aside. At my back the turntable whirred, the needle making a dull scrape among the last grooves. "As soon as I play part two of this I'll go." "But you've had the phonograph since dinner. It's my turn." "And I say no." I replied. "You have no business saying no to me," she said. "No business!" I exclaimed with an abrupt, raw jerk of anger. "It's my phonograph; you're keeping me from my phonograph!" "Well, if that isn't small," I said. "What you call me or think about me doesn't matter." Her voice rose above the *tac-a-tac* of the machine. "I want to listen to Cugat. I don't care."

"Look," I said making a strong effort to control myself. "I came up here with a purpose. What purpose it isn't necessary to tell you. But you couldn't stand to think that I should be here, alone, no matter why. Maybe you thought I was enjoying myself, ah? Or hiding away. So you hurried to see if you could spoil it for me. Isn't that true?" "You're such a clever man, uncle!" "Clever man!" I said, mimicking. "Movie talk. You don't even know what you're saying. This is absurd, quarreling with a stupid child. It's a waste of time. But I know you want to show how you feel toward me. I know how much and how genuinely you hate me. I thank God, child that you are, that you have no power over me." "You're crazy, Uncle," she said.

"All right, that's said and over, there won't be any more of it," I said, and believed that I was succeeding in checking myself. "You can listen to the conga or whatever it is when I leave. Now, will you go or sit down and let me play this to the end." "Why should

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I? You can listen to this. Beggars can't be choosers!" She uttered this with such triumph that I could see she had prepared it long in advance. "You're a little animal," I said. "As rotten and spoiled as they come. What you need is a whipping. "Oh!" she gasped, "You dirty . . . dirty no account. You crook!" I caught her wrist and wrenched her toward me. "Damn you, Joseph, let go! Let me go!" The album went crashing. With the fingers of her free hand she sought to reach my face. Seizing her by the hair fiercely, I snapped her head back; her outcry never left her throat; her nails narrowly missed me. Her eyes shut tightly, in horror. "Here's something from a beggar you won't forget in a hurry," I muttered. I dragged her to the piano bench, still gripping her hair. "Don't!" she screamed, recovering her voice. "Joseph! You bastard!" I pulled her over my knee, trapping both her legs in mine. I could hear the others running upstairs as the first blows descended and I hurried my task, determined that she should be punished in spite of everything, in spite of the consequences; no, more severely because of the consequences. "Don't you struggle," I cried, pressing down the nape of her neck. "Or curse me. It won't help you!"

Amos pounded up the last flight of stairs and burst in. Behind, breathless, came Dolly and Iva. "Joseph," Amos panted, "let her go; let the girl go!" I did not relinquish her at once. She no longer fought against me but with her long hair reaching nearly to the floor and her round, nubile thighs bare, lay in my lap. Whether this was meant to be an admission of complicity and an attempt to lighten my guilt or whether she wished them to see and savor it fully I did not know at first. "Stand up, Etta," Dolly said curtly. "Straighten your skirt." Slowly she got to her feet. I wonder whether any of them was capable of observing how alike we looked at that moment. "And now, if you can, Joseph," said Dolly turning her dilated eyes on me, "explain what you think you were doing." "Mother," Etta suddenly began to sob. "I didn't do anything to him. He attacked me." "*What!* In the name of God, what are you talking about!" I exclaimed. "I spanked you because you had a spanking coming."

What unspeakable inference or accusation was that in Dolly's widened eyes. I returned her look steadily. "Nobody has ever laid a hand on Etta for any reason whatsoever, Joseph." "Whatsoever! Is calling her uncle a beggar a sufficient 'whatsoever'? There's something ambiguous in your mind. Why don't you speak out?" She turned to Amos as though to say, "Your brother is going insane. Now he's springing at me." "I put her over my knee and gave her a hiding, and it wasn't half of what she deserves. She swore at me like a pool room bum. A mighty fine job you've done with her." "He pulled me by the hair, that's what he did," Etta cried. "He nearly twisted my head off."

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Iva, after turning off the phonograph, had seated herself near it in the background and did her best to efface herself. Which signified to me that she was acknowledging my shame. But there was no "shame". She too now came into the sphere of my anger.

"What else did he do?" Dolly demanded. "Oh, so you think she's covering something up! I spanked her. What else are you fishing for. What are you hoping she'll say. What sort of vulgarity. . . ." "Stop acting like a wild man!" Amos said peremptorily. "It's your fault, too," I retorted. "Look how you've brought her up. It's mighty fine, isn't it. You've taught her to hate the class and, yes, the very family you come from. There's a whatsoever for you. Are people to be null because they wear one pair of shoes a year and not a dozen? Try your teeth on that whatsoever!" "You had no right to raise your hand to the child," said Dolly. "Why doesn't he tell you what he was doing in your room," said Etta. I could see Iva sit up in her chair rigidly. "What?" said Dolly. "He was in your room." "I went there with Amos. Ask him," I said. "Daddy wasn't there when I saw you. You were looking in mamma's dressing table." "You little spy!" I shouted, glaring at her. "You hear?" I said to the others. "She accuses me of being a thief." "What were you doing?" Etta said. "I was looking for something. You can go down and assure yourself. There's nothing missing. Or you can search me. I'll let myself be searched." "Tell us, what was it? Nobody says you're a thief." "It's what you're thinking. It's clear enough to me." "Well, tell us," Dolly insisted. "It was only a pin, I needed one." In the darkened corner near the phonograph Iva lowered her head into her hands. "Hey! what are you acting up for, back there," I called out to her. "A pin, is that all?" Dolly said. She allowed herself, despite the seriousness of the moment, to smile.

"Yes. And it happens to be true." They did not answer. I said: "This, I suppose, makes my shame complete. I'm not only rash and stiff-necked, a beggar (I bowed to Etta who scornfully turned away her tear smeared face) "and" (to Amos) "a jackass, but really an idiot." Iva left the room without looking at me. "You, Amos," I continued, "can begin living me down. You, too, Etta. Dolly is not a blood relative so she's absolved, of course. Unless I bring disgrace on the whole family. Convicted of theft, or assault, or worse. . . ." Still neither Dolly nor Amos undertook to reply.

I followed Iva downstairs.

She did not speak to me on the street car and when we got off she hurried home ahead of me. I reached the door of our room in time to see her drop to the edge of the bed and burst into tears.

"Dearest," I shouted. "It's nice to feel that you at least have faith in me!"

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Books

The Shock of Unrecognition

THE SHOCK OF RECOGNITION. Edited by Edmund Wilson. Doubleday, Doran. $5.00.

Edmund Wilson's anthology is one of the best in recent years. It contains Henry James' little masterpiece on Hawthorne and Lawence's *Studies in Classical American Literature* and this alone is enough to make it the best *kind* of introduction to American writing available. It gains a good deal from Wilson's acute sense of the time and the place in which the literary work is engendered, and Wilson's brief introductory notes are significant additions to his work as a whole. Considered merely as a publisher's enterprise, the volume marks a really intelligent practice, that of giving editing to first-rate authors. The contrast between Quiller-Couch's anthology of English poetry and Yeats' is obvious enough as an example, and as an extreme, one ought to consider—it is better than a comic strip!—the growing impression that the author of *War and Peace* is Clifton Fadiman.

There is, however, nothing excellent about the title of this new anthology, nor the misleading picture of authorship and literary history which it enforces and which is made emphatic by many of the selections, although there are other important choices which bear very different witness. The title is drawn from a sentence of Melville's.

"For genius, all over the world, stands hand in hand, and one shock of recognition runs the whole circle round".

Surely a more inexact sentence about the fate of modern literary genius cannot be found.

One might ask, to begin with: What would Melville himself have said of this declaration in 1865, 1875, and in 1885, after the reception of *Moby Dick* and *Pierre* had reduced him, or helped to reduce him to an almost unbroken silence? Perhaps he was then too unhappy, perplexed, indifferent or benumbed to say anything.

The examples, however, are countless, and if I cite many of them, it is to make clear how overwhelming is the blindness of author for author. The classic examples of Voltaire's contempt for Dante and Tolstoy's dislike of Shakespeare (or even, with intermissions, of Dostoevsky) are perhaps too distant in time and place. But then there is Emerson's regret that Hawthorne was not a good author, since he was such a fine fellow, and the disregard Hawthorne suffered from his peers of which James speaks in the very pages which Wilson reprints; there

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is the hostility to Whitman which is not diminished very much by Emerson's brief praise, a hostility which Whitman describes in his prose; or, on Whitman's part, his blindness to Melville and especially *Moby Dick;* or, the long misunderstanding, like a great wall of China, which Henry James knew throughout his life not only in America but from such a one as Turgenev, whom he admired very much, and from H. G. Wells, whom he befriended, to which should be added James' own lack of the power of recognition, which made him review *Leaves of Grass* as he did, misunderstand Flaubert and Tolstoy, and celebrate, among the works of those he admired, chiefly the weakest books, particularly Edith Wharton's.

To continue, because the condition of lack of recognition is an important fact and a various one, there is the pathetic isolation of Emily Dickinson; Henry Adams' view of Henry James as one unable to write about women because he had not been married and his declaration that John Hay was superior to both James and Howells; and, when we come near the present, T. S. Eliot's sentences, reprinted in this volume and not too distant from James' profound pages on Hawthorne and authorship in America, that James was not "a successful literary critic," although what James says of Hawthorne in America is part of the explanation of Eliot's departure for Europe and his concern with life in a rooming house and in "a rented house," not to speak of royalism, classicism, and the anglo-catholicism. Then there, too, are the shocking remarks of Van Wyck Brooks about Joyce and Eliot, Eliot especially, of whom Brooks says that there is no evidence of religious feeling in any of his work! Against this, the letters of Sherwood Anderson which Wilson reprints and which expressed gratitude for Brooks' friendship seem not only slight, but ambiguous at the end, when a silence of thirteen years succeeds a period of warmth and intimate exchanges. One might mark out as a farcical height of unrecognition the fact that Van Wyck Brooks attacks Yvor Winters, unable to see that he is in the same trench with Winters, and not far from Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More, while for farcical and false recognition we have Brooks' praise of Cummings, Faulkner, and Aiken who are marked by the very qualities which make Brooks furious with Joyce and Eliot. And then, for a truly spectacular example, what was the shock of recognition, how did genius stand hand in hand, when Gide rejected Proust's novel in 1914? Where was the shock of recognition in Eliot and Pound when they first saw *Finnegans Wake?* They had championed Joyce many times, but they felt that this new work was nothing but self-indulgence.

Yet recognition exists also, however small next to unrecognition; and of the valuable and indeed necessary part which recognition plays this volume provides a full testimony. One might wish that Wilson had also included Pound's initial review of Eliot's first poems, a token

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of a long and fruitful relationship, or Eliot's recurrent tributes to Pound, Gertrude Stein's sentences about Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Anderson, and Cummings, Ford Madox Ford's greeting to Hemingway; and in the past, since Santayana is included, William James' ecstasies of recognition of other philosophers, and the letter of Mrs. Henry Adams in which, when she has just finished *A Portrait of a Lady*, she makes the perfect remark that poor Henry James always chews more than he bites off. This letter also contains a description of Henry James in Washington in 1880, "a young immigrant," vexed and perplexed by "the real, live, vulgar, quick-paced world in America." Yet it is easy and habitual to take a selection of this kind and find instances which should have been included. And one can only single out for exclusion Amy Lowell's *A Critical Fable*, as vulgar a piece as one is likely to encounter again very soon, while it is curious to find Wilson saying that Henry Adams' *Life of George Cabot Lodge* is "a cold and dreary little book" and then going ahead to print it in this volume exactly because it is an example of unrecognition. In fact, Wilson's brief pages on Adams also betray a lack of recognition and curious animus toward Adams who, quite opposite to Wilson's account, was prone to an excess of devotion, loyalty, and admiration for his friends. Adams seems, on the contrary, to praise a very weak poet too much. But this, and the pages on Poe which conclude with a strange comparison of Poe to Goethe, are the only places where Wilson's introductions are not illuminating.

Wilson speaks in his general introduction of "the cultural slump of the period after the Civil War," and there is much in the materials he has provided and in the period itself to suggest many reflections on the failure, defeat, and silence which succeeded the conflict. During the Civil War Thoreau and Hawthorne died, and when it was over, Emerson, Whitman, and Melville did little or nothing, although they lived for some twenty years. Does this not suggest that the war itself was one of the causes of the paralysis of these writers, defeat or annihilation of the values and motives which inspired the blaze of great works in the ten years before the War broke out? It is hard to determine to what extent and just in what way these authors were inspired by the ideals and the hopes of the young Republic. But perhaps the Civil War was a benumbing revelation, slow in effect, of the growing gulf between these authors' assumptions and the life about them.

This silence and emptiness of the post-bellum period suggests further reflections about the fact that, except for the fugitive James, no new authors of major status emerged, given the presumably favorable conditions of a new day of much energy and complexity in the national life. Part of the explanation is perhaps to be seen in Mrs. Adams' description of Henry James in Washington in 1882, merely

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bewildered or insensitive to the rich subject-matter about him, the politicoes, the robber barons, Henry Adams like Coriolanus waiting to be asked to hold office and tortured by a like pride, or Grant, a pathetic simple man who said long before that all he wanted of life was a small place in the country, and later, that he hoped his military successes would enable him to get the main street of his home town improved.

Another part of the explanation is the new international span of culture: the new tycoons were able to purchase Old Masters instead of seeking native art. And this in turn reminds one that in an industrial society, the rich have no full relationship to the life upon which their wealth is based, so that they feel no sympathy for or necessity for the representation of that life. But lastly, the following hypothesis suggests itself: the rate of social change in an industrial society is of such speed that the artist and especially the author no sooner makes his stand *qua* artist, to the character of his age than a new period arrives, his stand or poise is outmoded, and the attitudes upon which he has based his art have the period quality of millinery ten years old. They have no relevance to his perceptions in the new present. Perhaps this is one reason, in our time, for many a Proteus, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, and Auden, who come forward with a new style every five years, or use several styles at the same time.

At any rate, this is not the least of the virtues of Wilson's anthology, that it forces upon us speculations about the whole nature of literature, and especially literature in America.

DELMORE SCHWARTZ

ILLUSIONS OF OUR TIME

REFLECTIONS ON THE REVOLUTION OF OUR TIME. By Harold J. Laski. The Viking Press. $3.50.

When Tobruk fell to Rommel, Harold Laski is reported to have said that the British defeat marked not only the fall of a city but the bankruptcy of a social and economic order. What Laski said when Rommel was driven into the Mediterranean has not been reported.

The economic simplism of Laski's passing remark might be overlooked if it were an isolated judgment. But it reappears as the basic premise of his latest and most ambitious work. Without ceasing to be vague, Laski has now become doctrinaire. This is apparent not in his conclusions, many of which are true, but in the way he reaches them, in his failure to face difficulties and objections crucial to his position, and in his blithe disregard of the many inconsistencies in his thinking.

In a distinguished style, one notch above Max Lerner's, Laski attempts to show, among other things, that capitalism is doomed, that Fascism is counter-revolutionary, that capitalism must go fascist if not

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replaced by socialism, that democracy can be secure and secured only in a planned society, and that the Soviet system, in its essentials—freed from the temporary conditions of its emergence—is the hope of the world. Laski's appraisal of Russia is not to be found in his chapter on the Russian Revolution, in which anybody can find anything for any purpose, but in his peroration. In it he admits that Russia is not a democracy but asserts that the Russian masses enjoy a "positive freedom which the vast majority of human beings have hardly ever known they might dare to claim." (p. 400) Making but casual reference to inferior living conditions, political despotism and cultural regimentation, Laski writes: "When I compare the implications of this atmosphere with that of the capitalist democracies of Western Europe and America, it seems to me fantastic to deny it the achievement of an emancipation which the mass of men have never known in any other society." And all this because the Russians live in a planned society!

No orthodox Marxist could stress more emphatically than Laski the dominant influence of "the proportion between the forces of production and the relations of production." He does not employ this principle instrumentally in relation to concrete *problems* of socialist political activity in the present, where it could be tested and supplemented by what we have learned in the last fifty years. He takes it as something which has the status of an axiom and *deduces* from it certain judgments and prescriptions not checked against empirical data. He tells us that "the values of a civilization are always set by the proportion between its productive forces and its productive relations." (p. 202) In a capitalist society the proportion is disharmonious: in a socialist society, such as Russia, it is harmonious. He does not make an empirical study of values, as they are embodied in social behavior, in the different countries he surveys. His description of them follows from his dogma. When he does admit the similarity between the value-practices of Germany and Russia, where according to his formula different proportions obtain, he glosses over its significance with the assurance that in Russia this is merely a temporary phenomenon and bound to disappear. The assurance does not follow from an examination of the *direction* in which Russian culture has been developing from 1917 to the present in the fields of politics, art, and social life, where the facts are known, but from the official mythology. Thus, Laski is capable of writing that "there is nothing in the nature of the Bolshevik state which is alien to the democratic ideal." (p. 301) For Laski, the *nature* of the state is not to be construed from its behavior but from its 'essential' definition, or what it says about itself. But for anyone who judges the democracies in the same way he has unmeasured scorn.

And yet by his own simple logic, Laski's position is hopelessly

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at odds with itself. For if, as he believes, the underlying economy of a country is decisive for the quality of its culture, and if Russia is a worker's state and the United States, Great Britain and Germany are capitalist states, then Laski should conclude that the democracies have much more in common with Fascist Germany than with Russia. This would make Laski's war position completely untenable, except in terms of the strategy of imperialistic alliances, and cause floods of good rhetoric to go to waste. Indeed, one is often puzzled as to where Laski's rhetoric leaves off and his thought begins. After making so much ado about values being rooted in the proportion between the forces and relations of production, he writes: "The purpose of any scheme of values in a society is to promote the habits among its citizens which permit of expanding welfare." (p. 416) And this after we have just been told that the values of capitalist societies do not permit of expanding welfare. From which it follows that the United States and Great Britain have no values although they share them with Russia against Germany.

Laski's analysis of Fascism suffers from the same schematism and inconsistency. Fascism is characterized as rule by terror. It is "a waste of effort" to look for an idea or philosophy behind it. Hitler is an international Al Capone and Mussolini a Cesare Borgia. But in discussing the war, we are told that we shall not understand it unless we realize that: "We are fighting the counter-revolution. What do we mean by this term? That we are fighting the exponents of an idea." (p. 285) And the idea? The idea behind Fascism is "to breathe new life into the capitalist idea at a moment when the peaceful evolution of its relations would exhibit the fatality of the contradictions in which it is involved." Previously in answer to the question: "What is the essence of Fascism?" he answered: "It is the outcome of capitalism in decay." (p. 100) Capitalism in decay is "bound to be anti-democratic because it comes upon the historical scene when the relations of production it is defending are in decisive contradiction with the forces of production." (p. 286) Although he formally dissociates himself from the Communist interpretation of the nature of Fascism, in the main he accepts it.

We pass over the verbal inconsistencies in the above account, to note the basic contradiction in Laski's political line. Roosevelt and the New Deal are pictured not only as attempting to breathe new life into capitalism but as saviors of a liberal democracy after the war. Why, then, is Roosevelt not "bound" to become anti-democratic? "Nothing would be more helpful to our future," writes Laski, "than a victory won while President Roosevelt is in the White House." (p. 216) Why? "For it will present America with the momentous spectacle of a capitalist democracy able, by consent, to create the conditions in which the resumption of expanding welfare is possible."

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This is truly bewildering. What has happened to the contradiction between the forces and relations of production? And why cannot Great Britain, which is much further advanced along the lines of a welfare economy than the United States, likewise escape thralldom to Laski's formula? So far as I can see Laski attributes this momentous difference in historical possibility primarily to the personal difference between Roosevelt and Churchill. Churchill "is blind to the real nature of this war"; Roosevelt is not.

Perhaps the most disquieting section of Laski's book is his discussion of freedom in a planned society. He thinks it is sufficient to show that capitalism threatens the existence of the limited, and hard won rights and liberties of the majority of the population. But he offers nothing—absolutely nothing—to refute the contentions of skillful opponents of socialism that in this respect it may be even worse than capitalism or just as bad and therefore not worth the tremendous costs of upheaval and revolution. He ignores the problem of strengthening *specific* freedoms in a socialized economy, contenting himself with the vague assertion that "the substance of freedom requires redefinition in every historical situation." The question, of course, is not one of redefinition but primarily whether the specific freedoms we know and cherish, here and now, which are imperilled by certain tendencies in capitalism and destroyed outright by fascism, can be maintained in the social system Laski envisages. Freedom can be redefined in such a way as to make it possible to call the inmates of a concentration camp free, too. Apologists for capitalism usually redefine freedom to prove that the worker would be economically free were it not for his trade-union. Laski is a perfect 'fall guy' for such apologists and for critics of every variety of socialism. Discounting and extenuating the substance of Russian autocracy, redefining terminological shadows to prove that there is nothing alien to the democratic ideal in its state-practice, is possible only to a person who has no genuine passion for freedom. And when we speak of freedom we do not mean the freedom to buy cheap and sell dear but the freedoms without which the socialist movement could not have grown and without which its philosophy would be hardly distinguishable from that of fascism.

How explain Laski's cavalier disposal of all the genuine problems of freedom in a socialist society? It is a forfeit he pays to an unexamined dogma. He assumes that once material welfare (which can also be redefined to show that we enjoy it under capitalism!) has been provided for the community, cultural and political freedoms will sooner or later come into their own. For are not values set by the proportion between the forces and relations of production? And is not this proportion harmonious in a planned society by definition? Laski's dogma therefore explains his threefold certainty: that the processes of history must solve the problems of material welfare, not

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merely the problems of absolute want but those of inequality: that "fascism is a contradiction of the objective movement of history" and must disappear: and that democratic values must come to full flower under collectivism when the danger of a capitalist counter-revolution recedes.

Like most mixtures of opportunism and mysticism, Laski's position leads him to a brutality which will shock those who like myself have regarded him, until now, as a protagonist of democratic socialism. He lumps together the criticism by socialists of Russian practices which have betrayed socialist ideals with criticism by reactionaries who wish to restore capitalism in Russia. He says of the position taken by socialist critics that "it is a wholly mistaken one because it is unhistorical." (p. 411) Mr. Laski does not understand what an historical approach to a situation is. For him it is a justification of what has happened after it is safely over. At heart it is the view that whatever happens is right. And if all values are determined by the mode of economic production, and if at any given time there are no alternatives to the mode of production, as Laski believes, then whatever is, *is* right—or wrong for that matter, since there is no significant moral judgment without the recognition of an objective possibility of choice. There are reasons, of course, for whatever happens in history. This does not gainsay the existence of objective alternatives; not always and not in every respect, but wherever we attribute responsibility or blame. Laski implies that if we understand the Russian Revolution we will understand that its development in the main could be no other than what it was. But it would be easy to show that from the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly to the Stalin-Hitler Pact other alternatives existed equally compatible with the state of the productive forces. Laski recognizes this for certain aspects of Russian foreign policy but not for domestic policy, although on his theory both are related. "I think it probable that, had Lenin not precipitated the fatal split in the working-class forces implied in the foundation of the Communist International, certainly not Hitler, and perhaps not Mussolini, would have attained to power." (p. 84)

In an obvious sense this is a war book: one cannot escape the impression that had Hitler not invaded Russia, Laski's analysis, conclusions and even his theoretical premises would be very different. We can anticipate the program of political action that follows from his fundamental commitments, although Laski himself may not at the moment recognize it. It involves acceptance of ideological, and ultimately organizational, hegemony by Moscow over the international working-class movement. Such a program is disastrous and will increase the chances of domestic fascism in democratic countries after Hitlerism is defeated. Little can be said for it even as a strategic move. The justification of labor and socialist support of the military

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war against Fascism is that its defeat is an essential condition (but not sufficient) of the survival of the labor and socialist movement. While the war lasts, the labor movement and its allies must strive to give an anti-Fascist content to the war, and through its own independent political action mobilize wide popular sentiment for democratic goals. At certain points this brings it into conflict with reactionary forces in its own country which seek to liquidate social gains under the slogans of national unity. In this struggle the Stalinists are the most bitter opponents of independent and militant action. They side with the reactionaries and are actually calling for the arrest of Norman Thomas and other anti-Fascists who are trying to protect labor's position. Labor's task during the war is difficult enough, as Laski well realizes, since it must fight on two fronts. But he has created a program which, even if successfully carried out on one front, cannot but lead to defeat on the other.

SIDNEY HOOK

HEROES OF SELF-DEFEAT

THE CONSPIRACY OF THE CARPENTERS. By Hermann Borchardt. Simon and Schuster. $2.75.

It is impossible to read *The Conspiracy of the Carpenters*—the book's only chance is to have people talk about it.

In his imaginary account of what might have happened in a country like Germany some forty years ago, Borchardt parodies the manner of county or provincial history—a literary product usually so dull that it is of interest only to those whose names are mentioned in it. Since Borchardt's province does not exist, it is hard to see why he crowded it with so many uninteresting people. An army of Characters—aldermen, merchants, soldiers, wives, honest artisans, wrestlers, servants—bivouac in Borchardt's sagging pages; He builds scores of Significant Incidents; collects an immense album of Great Occasions, including excerpts from the long-remembered speeches delivered thereon. All of this is displayed with a kind of complacent wit that succeeds more often in looking odd than in being amusing.

What makes *The Conspiracy* a "novel" rather than the official history of, say Schaumburg-Lippe, 1894-1906, is that it is the chronicle of events that never took place, told in order to make a point. Borchardt's aim is to show how a nation torn by the characteristic conflicts of modern society can come out of it whole. The Republic he is describing is in a state of crisis, and the stage is occupied by the familiar political *dramatis personae* of our time. There is the grand old president (tyrannical and not even always honest but decidedly a great man), the class of sober merchants, the churchmen, the patriots. There are, too, the disruptive liberals, always making provocative speeches and writing articles about liberty, science and progress;

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behind whom lurk the truly subversive forces—the proletarian revolutionaries, who want to reduce man to the status of an ant, and the uniformed regiments of the League for Economic Peace, founded by the demagogic power-seeker, Urban.

By analogy with the actual history of Germany, Urban would take control. But in Borchardt's story he is blocked, beaten to the punch, and finally decisively K.O.'d by a new social group which Borchardt has invented for just such a contingency—the League of Carpenters, a sort of medieval guild in modern dress, the "ideal Christian commonwealth in vest-pocket form."

The Carpenters are Christian working men who will have no truck with the specious equality-theories of the liberals. They know their place and mean to keep it, insisting on their right to be ruled firmly by those whom Nature and God has set above them. By fighting, burning and killing they succeed in protecting the community which is built upon their backs, and provide their superiors with an example of how true masters should behave.

Such in barest outline is Borchardt's fable. The philosophy behind it is clear. Let the Christian virtues of humility, reverence for authority, and love of order take on flaming militancy among the lower orders and the day of political chicanery and base phrasemongering is over.

Mr. Borchardt has something here. All that is necessary in order to convert any community into a City of God is that those at the bottom of society, who might think of themselves as badly treated, should instead become filled with enthusiasm about being at the bottom and being ruled by those at the top. Through this one psychological stroke, everyone is at once made happy—and it would not be surprising if the self-subjugation of the ruled brought about an all-around improvement of social life. For the rulers, now sure of themselves, must become, or at least ought to become, calm, peace-loving and charitable, even developing a Jovian moral stature and an infallible sense of justice—the justice which is perfect because it comes from above, that is to say, from them.

Of course, nothing is a greater obstacle to this "brotherhood" than the tradition of democracy and individualism, whose spirit is enthusiasm for humanity and for oneself, and which has identified itself historically with Liberty and Equality, as well as with Fraternity. All such heresies as progress, scientific knowledge, written constitutions, etc., flow from the daemonic principles of freedom and equal rights.

So Borchardt's fable of the triumph of the Carpenters is an assertion of the authoritarian principle against the values of democracy and the free individual. In his dense and overpopulated dream, he touches on one of the most serious issues of modern culture. The hierarchial idea which wins in his Republic reflects the actual drag of the past

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upon all our social and political relations. Ancient concepts of authority still dominate the modern family, and the schoolroom, the State, and our personal pieties. Even more important, however, is the fact that the principle of authority constantly takes fresh and living forms from the modern industrial structure, which regiments the individual and subjects him to a superstructure of commands that disappears into the clouds. Thus authoritarian thinking can combine the spirit of medieval ethics with the body of twentieth-century corporate monopoly into a vision of the System Everlasting.

You might think that the ideal of the authoritarian capitalist community has had its trial in Germany and Italy, and that everyone now understands what the ideals of hierarchy and the law of social dictation mean today in practice. But Borchardt, though a refugee from these values, and even recommended to us by a session in a Nazi concentration camp, is not satisfied. He would like to re-stage the authoritarian pageant—seeking some "higher" motive of action than anything visible in the contemporary world.

Such Utopian dreaming might no doubt be dangerous. Yet it seems to me unnecessary to attack Borchardt for his "politics." His regressive values and medicine-man methods constitute neither a political theory nor a call to arms in the real world. He is the politician of the fabulous, of government, of, by, and for shadows.

We should, however, be less tolerant of Borchardt's literary style. For some reason it has seemed to him that his message would have greater gravity if it were accompanied by an endless supply of minutiae regarding the people and places that experienced the epic of the Carpenters. The effect of this heavy load of trifles about the nonexistent is to make *The Conspiracy* seem more like a dream than an allegory—a tiresome dream filled with municipal politics, market-place chatter, and outbursts of inconsequential and unreal violence.

Like Kafka, Borchardt has accepted the raw world produced by the inner processes of his mind. But, unfortunately, his mountains of detail have none of the magnetic power of Kafka's substances. In Kafka, too, there is often an immense element of dull shadowy fact. But in him boredom is overcome by the energetic conniving of forces that wind up the reader as if on a spool, bringing him so close to the object that it is repeated and enlarged in him with all the paranoia of daily existence. Borchardt's account completely lacks this polar force; the reader is simply invited to visit a dream place and dream people that he would avoid if they were a reality.

And as in all dreams, good or bad, fascinating or exhausting, the primary quality of this 600-page almanac of reaction is *eccentricity*. Like Wyndham Lewis' *Childermass*, a close contender for the title of Most Unreadable Book of The Age, *The Conspiracy* has not a single sequence without its oddities of reasoning, nomenclature, phrasing and

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form. Sometimes the writing is almost on the verge of genuine wit and pertinent irony. But it fails to stay above water, the heavy undertow of the author's chronicle style drags it down, and the sea of "information" covers it. On rare occasions, a recognizable caricature bobs up—for instance, the merchant Perlotta, who is "so far to the left" that he forbids his unhappy employees to join the unions because these organizations have "unmasked themselves as traitors to the proletariat."—But in general Borchardt's ironies and disfigurations suggest the sleep of a man bothered during the day by unexciting neighbors.

HAROLD ROSENBERG

TWO CHEERS FOR FORSTER

E. M. FORSTER. By Lionel Trilling. The Makers of Modern Literature Series. New Directions. $1.50.
A ROOM WITH A VIEW. By E. M. Forster. New Directions. The New Classics. $1.00.
THE LONGEST JOURNEY. By E. M. Forster. New Directions. The New Classics. $1.00.
HOWARDS END. By E. M. Forster. Alblabooks Series. Alfred A. Knopf. $2.50.
WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD. By E. M. Forster. Alblabooks Series. Alfred A. Knopf. $2.50.

The New Directions series, which began so admirably with Harry Levin's and David Daiches's volumes, continues even more admirably with Lionel Trilling's little book on E. M. Forster. Forster, whatever his limitations, is a writer we have no business to lose sight of, at the hour it is, and no choice of a commentator could have been happier than Mr. Trilling. He adds a voice to the current critical dialogue that has been badly needed. As everyone knows, our criticism latterly has been far too largely divided between the partisans of "poetry as knowledge" and the partisans of "poetry as action": Mr. Trilling, without perhaps the rigor of either, has a suppleness denied to most of the men in both camps. He writes as if he were aware that, though poetry is cerainly a form of knowledge, this can never be knowledge of Absolute Reality, and that, so far as poetry is action, it is decidedly action of what Kenneth Burke would call the symbolic order. It is more characteristic of him, indeed, to make little of either pure knowledge or the claims of action, but to treat literature as mainly a matter of reminiscent or anticipatory understanding. This too is a partial—and it might become a narrowing—view of the subject; but it is one that has a fruitful application at the moment.

There are good reasons why Forster should be so congenial a

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writer to Trilling. The English novelist's whole work might be described as a protest against pedantry and priggishness, the two vices from which our intellectual life now suffers as the English intellectuals suffered from them a generation ago—and with neither priggishness nor pedantry will Trilling have any truck. It is hardly worth speaking of his freedom from pedantry, from that dreary habit of "taking more pride in the possession of one's intellect than joy in the use of it," which has spread beyond its proper and natural sphere in the academies and infected so much of our mental air as to tempt one to describe the time, not as the Age of Fishes, but as the Age of Pedagogues. Mr. Trilling has, simply, the natural sense of relations, of what is worth emphasizing and what is not, which no pedagogue ever achieves; and as a result his learning, which is considerable, is always at the service of his intention, never a substitute for it.

A more difficult feat to-day, however, is to think and write without priggishness, without a knitting of the moral brows, without servitude to a hypertrophied will or conscience, without that humorless sense of misapplied responsibility which has imparted to so much of our writing its anxious aridity, its air of moral worry, its quite peculiar *sécheresse* of tone. It was a similar thing in English mental life that *Howards End* and *A Room with a View* were written, thirty years back, to aerate and to dispel; and Mr. Trilling, who has not forgotten Matthew Arnold's protest against the exaggerated "Hebraism" of British culture, is in natural sympathy with Forster's comic insight, his distrust of absolutes, his hatred of smugness, his rejection of the sternly dualistic "knowledge of Good and Evil" for the humorous, naturalistic knowledge of "good-and-evil." It is, as I say, a difficult feat in an age tortured by anxiety and inevitably haunted by the sense of guilt, difficult in the personal and in the literary life, to remember and assert the claims of imagination, of irony, of taste, of the "hilarity" that Emerson credited to the hero; but it is necessary to do this, terribly necessary, if the deadfalls of mere neurosis are to be successfully skirted. Fiction like Forster's is a prop of this sort in bad days, and so, on its own level, is Trilling's criticism.

On the positive side, his essay is not only an admirable exposition of Forster's work, but a delicate rendering of its quality and its value for us. If one has a reservation, it is that, negatively, Trilling leaves somewhat too much in the air the question of Forster's rather subtle failure to suggest the highest distinction, his "refusal to be great," his own version of the *gran rifiuto*. For Trilling quite properly claims only a secondary stature for Forster. I wish he had pushed his account of it a little farther; no more than any writer is Forster a prop on whom we can lean and loafe at our ease, indifferent to the special dangers of *his* sense of things. Fortunately it is possible to describe

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these at least partly in his own language. "Only connect!" says a character in a famous passage in *Howards End*. "Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer." It is what Forster has always aimed to do, with a fine humility but imperfect success. And this partly because his "prose" has rarely been prosaic enough—tough enough, stern enough, hard enough—or his "passion" sufficiently strong. He has, at his best, "connected" a humorous and healthy prose with a warm and generous passion, and for that we esteem him: has he lighted much of the way toward connecting a harsher prose with a passion more absorbing, more wholly committed?

Surely not, and surely this is because his "double vision" has never been quite so double as it ought to be, or his irony so searching. In his own language, though he has certainly avoided the "pinchbeck mean," he has achieved the silver rather than the golden mean. His later expressions—the pieces on "The New Disorder," "The Ivory Tower," "Two Cheers for Democracy"—abounding as they do in false alternatives and too easily humorous simplifications—are a clue to this. "There never will be a new order, and there never has been an old one"—as if order, in society, must needs be absolute lest it be mere "muddle." "Consequently I hold that the artist ought to be an outsider"—as if there were a simple choice between outside and inside, and as if, by the way, the artist who chose either could "connect" any great contrarieties. "So two cheers for Democracy," not three, because it is "less hateful than other contemporary forms of government"—as if so tepid a passion would ever be a menace to any old order or any new one. "Tolerance, good temper, and sympathy"—but has Forster forgotten an early tale of his own ("The Point of It") and the image in it of a flat, sandy, foggy plain which is the Hell reserved for the Soft, for "the sentimentalists, the conciliators, the peacemakers, the humanists, all who have trusted the warmer vision"? Every man, as he grows older, he added, becomes either harder or softer: it is surely very forgiveable if so humane a writer has become softer with age, but the process throws a critical light back upon his earlier career, and accounts for our refusal of the third cheer for Forster. It was always his strength that he could repeat Blake's prayer so seriously:

May God us keep
From single vision and Newton's sleep

It has been his weakness that he has seen too little meaning in Blake's great proverb: "The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction."

NEWTON ARVIN

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ART IN VARIOUS ASPECTS

THE POLITICS OF THE UNPOLITICAL. By Herbert Read. Routledge, London. 7/6d.

NEW FRONTIERS IN AMERICAN PAINTING. By Samuel M. Kootz. Hastings House. $5.00.

ANATOMY OF MY UNIVERSE. Text and drawings by André Masson. Curt Valentin. $6.00.

TWELVE BRONZES. 16 collotype plates. By Jacques Lipchitz. Curt Valentin. $2.50.

The *Politics of the Unpolitical,* despite its slender dimensions, comes as Herbert Read's most distinguished contribution to cultural understanding. There are aspects of Read's individual sensibilities that I have long deplored, but the current volume lingers upon pleasantly general grounds; this time there is nothing more provoking than the usual enthusiasm for Dali and Rouault.

Read delineates the progress of world-culture with an approved Marxian perspective. He unearths new connections between art and ideologies, and recapitulates old ones with unusual neatness. He writes in a lively manner,—in fact, he exhibits quite unexpected capabilities as a rabble-rouser; chapter 4 (*To Hell with Culture*) should warn our museum-directors to start barricading their bureaux: "The whole of our capitalist culture is one immense veneer . . . to the rubbish heap and furnace with it all! Let us celebrate the democratic revolution with the biggest holocaust in history. When Hitler has finished "bombing our cities, let the demolition squads complete the good work." Read's political line (production for use) is less specific than his cultural analyses, and he is frequently guilty of over-simplification. But the appraisal of fascism is striking and precise. The Nazis appear *more* democratic (in an equalitarian sense) than the democracies, and they "at any rate acknowledge the importance of art, which is more than any British government has ever done." Yet, despite the vast art-programs, no modern dictatorship has yet struck off a genuine creative spark. Because art, Read tells us, depends on complete freedom,—or rather on "letting the artist alone." At this point I feel that we bump against a knotty obstruction; I find it difficult to forget that many of the world's great monuments (the sculptures of ancient Egypt or the frescoes at Ajanta) were products of complete slave-labor. Yet, despite stylistic dictation as well, they were conceived with a nobility that little of our "free" art can approach. I do not think it is as much a question of "letting alone" as an integration within the society which is producing the culture; if the artist is given a natural place—no matter how humble—in the social structure I think he can stand almost anything. In other words, I should ascribe the failure of fascist art

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to the same causes as the failure of most official democratic art to date,—the reactionary orientation of the system to begin with. Under present conditions it is possible to produce good work only in comparative privacy. A truly free society would have to be orientated differently,—for this reason all artists look forward to it; and then perhaps they will no longer have to be "let alone". Read pins his hopes for the future on what he describes as a sort of "guild socialism."

My divergence from Read's standards of quality can perhaps be shown by quoting such pronouncements as the following: "if an object is made of appropriate materials to an appropriate design . . . it is *automatically* a work of art. . . . When the profit system has to place function before it, as in the production of an aeroplane or racing-car, it also inevitably produces a work of art." Now I admit that a handsome automobile is far more impressive than most products of the contemporary art-market. But a truly distinguished painting (which is and always has been a rarity) betrays an indefinable imprint that for me transcends the expressive range of any machine-made, functional organism. As in all esthetic matters, Time will probably provide the test; in a number of years our beautiful bombers may well look out-moded and not a little silly. I attribute Read's fondness for surrealist pictures (so many are as devoid of the sensitive touch as a racing-car) to his denial of this qualitative distinction between art and machinery. However, in another section he maintains "that there is a sense in which art is expression and not merely making"; and he does differentiate surrealism, which echoes the break-up of our disease-ridden, capitalist world, from abstraction,—a true revolutionary expression, that is keeping the essentials of art alive through a critical period.

Samuel Kootz, in his analysis of modern art-currents in America, plunges with unbounded confidence upon a heroic undertaking. The subject turns out to be even larger than his title indicates; for, as our cultural movements are based on what took place in Europe during the last half-century, Kootz gives considerable space to "ancestors", from Cézanne to the cubists and their heirs. A further chapter is devoted to the timely task of "exposing" painters who are not modern in any sense, but which the museums put forward as such; this is to my mind the liveliest portion of the volume, for the author convincingly ties the "American scene" school to other nationalistic revivals that sprouted throughout the world in the wake of the depression. I liked, too, his debunking of eclectic moderns such as Weber, Hartley, and Kuhn.

The remainder of the text is given over to such "advanced" painters as are most active in America today. Kootz has organized them according to tendencies and the result forms a sort of appraisal-sheet; he tells why each artist succeeds or fails, and gives reasons. There is no

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blind-man's buff when Kootz is engaging painters, and one can appraise with equal clarity the exact ground from which he is striking. Such a procedure certainly has its points, for we must remember that most of this ground is virgin soil. American art has previously been approached largely from superficial angles with its more modern aspects quite ignored. The public needs a few pegs to hang things on, even if they are not all substantial; in this book at any rate, many crucial problems that beset the artist are brought into the light.

Considerable learning and understanding are natural prerequisites for such an undertaking. And there are obvious weaknesses to the conclusions we are led to here. The book was perhaps hastily conceived, as the writing at times betrays an appreciable thinness; at least the art-currents never seem carried quite down to the ends; they are often chopped off with highly debatable generalizations. I will give an example of how Kootz can spoil an analysis. His judgment of the surrealist painters I find substantially correct, but what can we say to this sentence? "I believe Surrealism, which had its greatest appeal in the emptiness and decadence of France immediately before the present war, cannot survive in the sturdy soil of America." To begin with, it was never in France but in the sturdy soil of Fifty-seventh Street that surrealism found its broadest appeal, with London an able second-string. (I recall my surprise at the *few* surrealist works one would encounter in Paris,—even when the Blum government was backing large abstract and other modernist projects.) And further I hope that the whole question of pre-war French emptiness and decadence will soon be re-examined. (This elusive point was also over-simplified by Read.) Some day it may be apparent that there was greater vitality in disunited France than in her more militarily successful neighbors after all.

Kootz's personal tastes fluctuate between expressionism with abstract overtones (Rattner, Quirt, etc.) and abstraction with expressionist overtones (the type of Davis reproduced). This is of course his privilege, and it is to be conceded that many great works (particularly in the past) have been created within these limits. But the movement he designates as non-objective is one wherein I feel he can mislead us. In this section he writes that the painters "attempt to find perfection in geometry"; Mondrian is "withdrawn from all humanity, vegetating in a small garden into which the spirit and sensation never enter." This is of course quite funny, when one considers that most non-objective artists loathe geometry, and that Mondrian's work is built on sensation to an amazingly acute degree. I think that in the light of modern developments the relation of "life" to art is much less obvious than previously supposed. If Koots uses a word like "humanity" in its illustrative sense, then he might as eloquently maintain that a Bach fugue (or any non-literary music) was also empty mathematical prob-

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lem or technical exercise. What he still has to prove is that plastic sensibilities cannot live too on their own terms. To some people, of course, these terms provide the *true* revolution expressive of our era and Kootz's tastes lie caught in a fabric left over from the renaissance. Later he writes "the ultimate failure of non-objective art lies in its inability to renew itself." This could be disputed on several grounds. First, is that really a test of an art-cycle? (It may be recalled that Egyptian art varied remarkably little, but within closed limits masterpieces were produced for three thousand years.) And secondly it can be contradicted. The great obstruction to art-appreciation has always been that all forms (particularly when they are strange) must be approached from a point of view. Only thus can we account for the long neglect of the Italian primitives, or the fact that to western eyes oriental art, until comparatively recently, looked all alike. To any one who expects connections between non-objective art and geometry instead of experiencing its sensibility, which is so subjective and internal, there may not seem to be much development. But if its terms are met, the work of such a seemingly restricted painter as Mondrian becomes endless in its variety. Kootz continually reaffirms his interest in all branches of abstraction; it seems to have got under his skin. For this and other reasons I should count his book the most enlightened yet to appear on American painting.

Among the cherishable products of the pre-war Paris luxury-trade were the large illustrated volumes through which contemporary artists could be studied in various individual facets; by comparison, most American monographs seem hopelessly business-like and amateurish. The Buchholz Gallery has recently issued books on two leading European artists now working in our midst that are so reminiscent of the old Paris art-book as to induce a pleasant nostalgia on sight. It is of further interest to see what Masson and Lipchitz are doing today. Moreover, the two have points of similarity; each worked somewhat apart from the movement with which he was connected (or rather straddled several movements) and each started out with an immense promise that I don't think in either case has been quite fulfilled.

The case of Masson is particularly sad. When I come across examples of his early work (1925-30) I am always impressed anew with its ease and virtuosity. He could impart a directness—as if the paint were blown in patterns on to the canvas—which most painters work years to achieve. The result was slight but always striking at first glance; a greater structural weight was required, and the post-cubist generation would have been enriched by something truly notable. Evidently some such need was also felt by Masson, for he began to fill his areas with more and more shapes and lines; he tried for added weight by loading in subject-matter. And it was not very long before he had lost the effortless abandon, it would seem, as irrevocably as a

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singer who has lost his voice. I recall Braque once having remarked that painting must appeal primarily to one's innards, and that attempts to link it up with the "cosmos," etc., usually end by looking merely silly. Yet this is where Masson sought his salvation; he writes that he has become "the mirror in which the fraternal kingdoms and the four elements are reflected . . . a cardinal point fixed on the membranes of liberty." So he has executed a vast collection of drawings, entitled *Anatomy of my Universe*, in which he links up his art with sentiments akin to the above. For his expressive equipment he has drawn heavily on the surrealist repertoire. The pages fairly bristle with arms and legs that turn into vegetables at the ends, heads made out of carpenters' implements, lighted candles and chestnut-burrs in lieu of private parts, etc. I maintain, as always, that a great and distinguished style could conceivably integrate such fantastic symbols into an enduring art-form. But Masson at this stage has lost his directness, the realization creaks with effort, and above all the expressive force is blunted in a welter of scratchy detail. In his still more recent paintings (shown last winter) Masson gave hints of returning again to his rightful beginnings, and starting out anew.

The work of Lipchitz was of a serious order from the start. Here was a sculptor who, along with an innate ungainliness, showed indications of real weight and substance. Although lacking in the elegance of Gabo or Brancusi (there was always a "pompier" quality that he never quite transcended) Lipchitz nevertheless had a true appropriateness in the twentieth century world. His was robust, outdoor sculpture, that could hold its own with architecture and machinery; he should have found a logical place in our culture, just as Léger's paintings seemed the essence of America long before he visited our shores.

The change to new surroundings is invariably more critical for an artist than one might imagine. Léger, for instance, curiously seemed to lose the very quality that made his Paris paintings a natural expression for our modern cities. It is not surprising, therefore, that the new sculptures of Lipchitz betray a lack of integration among their elements. For me the regular rod-like cylinders seem of a different spirit than the roughly-fingered forms which support them. Yet, although uneven in quality, the twelve bronzes reproduced in Mr. Valentin's book are obviously from the hand of a master. With the exception of Mondrian I should select Lipchitz as having done more sensitive work here than any other of the European artists. Furthermore—and this we would hardly expect from one who had done his previous work in Paris—the abstract head entitled *Barbara* shows a finer and more aristocratic quality than anything this sculptor has achieved before. He has perhaps compensated for the loss of his old monumentality.

GEORGE L. K. MORRIS

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On Italy

WHAT TO DO WITH ITALY. By Gaetano Salvemini and George La Piana. Duell, Sloan and Pearce. $2.75.

The Nemesis that under various names has been scourging Europe for thirty years has now accomplished a new deed of retribution. The Italian State is dead.

The Third Italy, or the Third Rome, as they used to say. It was represented by a prosperous goddess with a star on her forehead and a tricolored mantle around her waist. The star was meant to symbolize a particular brand of good luck; thanks to the astuteness of her rulers, she would eventually always find a way out. It was the Savoy brand of luck, the ability to be a parasite of history.

Now the game is definitely over. The Italian State, born and expanded out of a shrewd game of power politics, has been torn to pieces by power politics, collapsing in such swamps of shamelessness, double and triple betrayals that its nauseating agony finally does not matter at all. The disproportion between the events and the behavior of princelings, priests, generals, diplomats and bureaucrats is too enormous. Until the very last moment, and after, they tried to cheat history, frantically weighing lesser evils against blood and ruins. To try to give an account of their minds one should perhaps go back to those obscure pedants of late sixteenth century Italy, machiavellians gone mad from too much hairsplitting over the idea of treason, who considered themselves political thinkers, and solemnly gave advice that "When a tyrant is threatening, it is better to flee, but when life is safe one should stay and say that he wants to save the fatherland." The truth is simpler. Those men never had anything in common with their people, were never anything but individuals with special privileges. Now they have fled, or have been swept away by the tornado. Somebody may have a use for them, but the Italian people certainly have none.

The Italian people are left alone with death, destruction, hunger and despair. Such company is not new to them, and is at least not dishonorable. Now they can be received with full rights into the great brotherhood of European misery. One can only hope that they fully realize how alone they are, and that they won't expect salvation from the outside.

What about the future?

I myself am only too inclined to think that after 1940 there is not much room left anywhere in Europe for reconstruction plans and concrete proposals, and that people will simply go on refusing obedience until the last vestige of the old powers has disintegrated. But I know that this is not a "realistic" attitude, and I am very eager to listen to matter-of-fact opinions.

So far as Italy is concerned, I don't know of any person who is

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more apt to give matter-of-fact opinions than Gaetano Salvemini. His one-man struggle against fascism has been carried on for twenty years by the force of sheer moral passion and documentation. Before fascism, Gaetano Salvemini struggled against State corruption and party politics in Italy on the basis of a very dogged kind of positivism, maintaining that social and political questions were not a matter of ideologies, but "problems", and problems had to be studied on the basis of facts, and that was all. This was his main contention in his polemics against socialists. In America, he published a little book on "Historian and Scientist"; its point is that the historian is an honest man looking for truth and that little more can be said about history. Honesty, for him, is the first and last word about every human problem, and honesty, he would probably add if he cared for general statements, cannot be taught. The story goes that once, in his young days, Gaetano Salvemini was listening to a discussion about ethics at the Philosophical Society of Florence. Young and elderly professors said many things about Kant, Maine de Biran, Croce, etc. Finally, they asked Salvemini for his opinion. He stood up and said: "Frankly, I don't understand a word of what you are saying. To me, ethics is an honest man. And I can tell one when I meet him," then sat down.

To understand such an attitude, one has to remember that Salvemini is a peasant from a very poor section of Southern Italy, where people think much, say little and have big dreams which they know cannot be realized. Salvemini's passion for facts and unmeasurable scorn for party ideologies and theoreticians come from those roots. One could accuse him of being narrow-minded, and even of a complete lack of understanding of the true nature of social problems. Nobody could ever deny that his truthfulness knows no limits or compromises. He once served as a deputy, and the late Prime Minister Giolitti (whom he had called "the Minister of the Underworld" because of certain electoral methods which clearly foreboded fascism) used to say of him in his own suave way: "Salvemini is my best ally. When he makes a speech the whole Parliament turns against him and forgets my humble person". More recently, I remember Salvemini in Paris, in 1935, making a very short appearance on the platform of the Congress of Antifascist Writers. It was organized by Stalinists, and everybody knew it; but since the line was democracy and the united front against fascism, they had invited all kinds of people, from Gide and Malraux to A. Huxley, E. M. Forster and Thomas Mann. Salvemini had been invited too. The clue of the Congress was the presence of a Soviet delegation apparently led by Alexis Tolstoi. Everything was fine. Everybody made his little speech in praise of democracy and tolerance, avoiding, even if only out of politeness, the Soviet issue. Then came Salvemini. He said just a few words very

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much to the point. Something like this: "I am fighting fascism because I hate tyranny in all its forms. I understand that there are fascist states. But I understand also that there is a country called the Soviet Union. That country is under dictatorial rule. In that country today Leo Tolstoi would be prevented from writing. In that country today a European writer is kept in prison in violation of every right of the human person. His name is Victor Serge. I propose that we free European intellectuals express our solidarity with the oppressed people of the Soviet Union and demand the liberation of Victor Serge." There was complete panic. The Stalinists hissed and screamed, the others applauded. The whole facade of the Congress was collapsing. One obscure Soviet writer made a rabid speech to the effect that Victor Serge was a Soviet citizen and nobody had a right to interfere with Soviet proletarian justice. But the issue had been raised, and the official line was such that it was impossible just to ignore the scandal. In small groups hastily summoned, the French begged the Soviet delegates to try to do something about Victor Serge. Salvemini is certainly one of the men who contributed to Serge's liberation.

During the last three years, Salvemini has dedicated himself chiefly to the task of showing, in connection with the Italian problem, in how many ways British and American policies are not consistent with the idea of a "democratic war". To examine the question whether or not a "democratic war" was conceivable or was seriously to be expected, or try to define in general terms the real nature of this war, he considers not his business. He is an American citizen and a specialist in Italian questions, he wants to stick to his limited job and keep it as limited as possible. On the one hand he wants to influence American foreign policy in a democratic way by appealing to public opinion and, on the other, to provide information for those Italians abroad who worry about their future course.

What he is really doing is telling drastic truths. As a result he is considered an awful troublemaker and a completely uncooperative man by conformists of all denominations. Official spheres think him "bitter"; for them, naturally, his documents are just useless and more especially "ill-timed". Well-intentioned persons in Italian liberal circles who would like so much to hear any argument in favor of some kind of democratic compromise feel discouraged. And, at the same time, he seems inadequate to those who would like him to draw general conclusions and build a clear theory from the very hard truths he is so generous in disseminating. The fact is that Salvemini is not a politician at all, but has been all his life and consistently remains a political pamphleteer of that 18th century stem which has had some good shoots in Italy too. Such as he is, Salvemini is for Italians much more of a representative and living figure than Croce himself.

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What To Do With Italy is above all a book of documents, facts, and of good faith. The authors evidently intended to show that it would be possible, for the leaders of the United Nations, to solve the Italian problem according to democratic principles. The first chapter contains a demonstration that never for a moment was a democratic solution of the Italian problem taken into serious consideration in the high spheres of London and Washington. As for unofficial indications, the article by Kingsbury Smith in the *American Mercury* for November 1942 is recalled, where it was "stated clearly that the European nations should expect, not an immediate return to democratic forms of Government, but a long transitional period of semi-dictatorships".

As for the nature of these "semi-dictatorships", Salvemini and La Piana cite a panegyric of the fascist regime written by Lord Lloyd and published in December 1939 with an introduction by Lord Halifax:

> "Above all, the Italian genius has developed, in the characteristic Fascist institutions, a highly authoritarian regime which however threatens neither religion nor economic freedom nor the security of other European nations. The Italian system is founded on two rocks: first, the separation of Church and State and the supremacy of the Church in matters not only of faith but of morals; second, the rights of labor. The political machine of Fascism is indeed built on trade-unionism while that of the German State is built up on the ruins of the German labor movement. The Italian State, like that of Spain and Portugal, is neither socialist nor capitalist, but syndicalist.

Salvemini and La Piana think that this kind of talk represents "ignorance, stupidity and insincerity". But they certainly realize that there has always been and still is a very clear method in this stupidity. What matters is not the panegyric itself, but the components of this panegyric: authoritarianism, Church, corporatism. The same components we find at the basis of contemporary reaction everywhere. As a matter of fact, they are pillars without which the modern State structure cannot hope to survive. And this is what gives importance to another document quoted by the authors: the article by Count Michael de la Bedoyère, editor of the London *Catholic Herald,* dated April 18, 1943,in which it is stated:

> "The Church sees things hidden from the average Englishman or American, who is concentrating on destruction of the evils of Hitlerism. The Church sees that a new order in Europe, under the leadership of Great Britain, America and Russia, might turn to be a Europe dominated by Russia. Just as the creation of a moderately authoritarian bloc in good time might have prevented war from breaking out, so the nursing, so to say, of the same elements at the present time may help to stabilize a very dangerous and difficult situation after the war".

Well, this is the very same idea—made general and consistent—of "Fascism without Mussolini" which, according to Salvemini and La Piana, has uninterruptedly inspired Allied policy toward Italy.

Significantly enough, almost half of this book is dedicated to Vatican policies and to the problem of the Catholic Church in postwar Italy. The indictment of the Vatican could hardly have been more

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vigorous and better documented. It is a sinister story of cowardice, greed and actual bloodthirst (on this point the authors forgot to mention Austro-Catholicism and such episodes as that of Pius XI congratulating, in February, 1934, the chiefs of the Dollfus police after the slaughter of the Viennese workers). But, above all, it is a story of relentless immorality, which certainly did not begin with Pius XI.

The Catholic problem is absolutely fundamental to Italian society. The authors have discovered a little quotation that helps to focus the issue. It is a statement by Cardinal Lavitrano, chairman of the Committee of Bishops in charge of Catholic Action in Italy. In February, 1940, Cardinal Lavitrano had to take note that "sixty per cent of Italian men do not hear Mass on religious holidays and only twelve per cent of Italian men receive the Holy Communion on Easter." The religious fervor of the Italian people seems rather tepid, and the idea that Italy is a Catholic country becomes suspect in the light of this complaint. But then one has to realize that the Catholic Church depends not at all for money and power on the numbers of people who *ask* for its rites. Money and power the Vatican gets from other sources, and by all kinds of manipulations. The brutal fact (which Salvemini and La Piana fail to state openly) is that for political strength and financial resources the Catholic Church now depends exclusively on North and South American countries. Europe is finished. This explains many acts of collusion. If tomorrow Italian priests had to rely exclusively on the subsidies of their flock, they would be forced to return to the condition of mendicant friars.. The spirit of the Gospel would probably gain, but not the Catholic Church.

This is fundamentally the reason why it seems impossible to agree with the solution of the Vatican problem proposed by the authors of this volume. Essentially they suggest a return to the principle of separation of State and Church, accompanied by the formal recognition of the Vatican as an independent political power. Church incomes would be drastically reduced as a result of the many radical economic measures urged by the authors. For the rest, Salvemini and La Piana trust the natural evolution of things.

In my opinion an Italian Republic born under the auspices of any compromise whatsoever with the Vatican would be stillborn. The Catholic Church is a totalitarian organization based on economic privilege. The one thing a young republic must *not* do is to legalize its existence, thus preserving its institutional powers. The only possible concession might be not to destroy it by violent means. The question is not to forbid the priests to celebrate Mass, but to see to it that they do not get one cent except from those who actually attend the Mass. The poor people of Italy would understand such a procedure very well. They would also understand a republic establishing the principle that no authority, nor right to speak for others is con-

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ceded to anyone who is not delegated by the people concerned through direct election. This would do away with the Catholic hierarchy.

I have the impression that Salvemini and La Piana would have seen the problem of the Catholic Church in a different light if, instead of considering Italian social and political reconstruction only as a series of particular reforms, they had been willing to discuss the principles and fundamental laws of a new society established on a foundation of liberty and equality. What they say of industrial and especially agrarian reform indicates that in practice they are prepared to accept the most radical measures, provided such measures can be applied without violence and dictatorship.

After the Russian Revolution it has become clear to sensible people that it is not permissible to experiment with societies, that is to say, to make bloody mistakes. Experiments involving successive outbursts of State violence not only result in contradictory compromises but lead naturally to totalitarian reaction. So we can agree with the authors that gradualism *might* be a plausible policy. It is one thing, however, to know how to compromise with realities and something else again to be uncertain of the fundamental principle of action. Compromise is obviously not a principle, and actually compels one to shift from one line of action to another in accordance with what seems expedient at the moment. When Salvemini and La Piana contend that private ownership in Italy will have to be "very much restricted", or that the expropriation of the latifundia in Italy should be accompanied by a "modest" indemnity, we can safely say that this is not a sufficient basis for a new society or, for that matter, even a viable republic. The authors' policy would arouse the opposition of the ruling classes without gaining the support of the common people. The whole tragic story of modern democracies is to be discerned in this crucial political error. You cannot mobilize the people for the defence of new institutions by means of an "almost" that is in itself hypothetical, subordinated as it is to the problem of who has the actual power. As to the Catholic Church, certainly to invade the convents would be hateful, but to recognize them as private corporations means to recognize their right to stay. The problem of the Catholic Church is for the Italian people a problem of moral life or death. It cannot be solved through a judicious compromise. At bottom it is for the Italian peasant himself to dismiss the priest. This requires education, social conscience and social work. But it is the problem of the Italians, and we have no reason to discuss it with bishops and popes, nor, for that matter, with American Catholics and Anglo-Catholics.

One thing we may be sure of: for the people of Europe there are no more lesser evils or half-goods.

MARIO D'ANDREA

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Variety

Benjamin Fondane and the Experience of the Bridge

As the translator of Benjamin Fondane's study of Baudelaire (cf. page 410 of this issue), I am responsible for introducing this French essayist—now a refugee in South America—to readers of the PARTISAN REVIEW. Introductions are generally governed by the rules of courtesy, and if in making certain criticisms of Fondane's piece by way of introducing him I violate these rules, my justification lies in the political tradition of the PARTISAN. For good or ill, modern politics is a *school of rudeness*—not understanding this, many of the intellectuals were provoked by Sidney Hook's strictures on Kenneth Burke and Jacques Maritain, and of course by the tone of most of the articles in the "Failure of Nerve" series. The exquisite aristocratic tact which subtly specified the circumstances under which things could be called by their right names is today something we know about largely from books, not from anybody's public behavior. And we have to face the political fact that the right-wing in literature, which justifies itself as "aristocratic", is concerned under all circumstances to call all things by their *wrong* names.

But to return to Benjamin Fondane. His study of Baudelaire—so fine in many ways—seems to me striking evidence of the fact that the ability to grasp the experience of a poet is not necessarily bound up with the capacity to make correct generalizations about it. Fondane, a disciple of Shestov and Kierkegaard, has unquestionably a real flair for the *profound*, a liking for and a sympathy with experiences of a shattering and fundamental character. Of this rather exceptional *taste* he tries to make a normative principle. Inevitably he falls into self-contradiction. After telling us that the poet has no "mission", and that art is not a means to any definite end, and charging T. S. Eliot with not "daring" to admit this, Fondane says: "Art, Baudelaire knew, he was the first to know it, is only *faking*, the best means we have, the instrument best suited for casting a veil over the terrors of the abyss. Neither Kant, Hegel nor Schopenhauer told us this." Had they indeed told us this, I am of the opinion that they would not at the same time have denied that art has a "mission", or is a means to any definite end. The philosophers who came before Nietzsche at least did not *try* to contradict themselves.

As a matter of fact it was Nietzsche himself who fathered the view that art is the best means we have for casting a veil over the terrors of the abyss. I would object to this position even if its proponents from Nietzsche to Fondane, were able to hold to it consistently—naturally it is no argument in its favor that they are not. The politics with which Nietzsche buttressed the position are out and out reactionary. Who to-day is so simple-minded as not to know which forces stand to profit by the veiling, rather than the revealing, of real relations? But it might be argued that the abyss—in Fon-

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dane's book *La Conscience malheureuse* this is his argument—and its terrors are something special, that among all the horrors of existence there are some which have peculiar metaphysical rights and are properly exempt from the political, seeing that they are always with us. Only if the abyss is temporal are there social grounds for insisting that art confront it. But if by the abyss is meant that which is *unsolvable;* incurable disease, "The awful daring of a moment's surrender/Which an age of prudence can never retract", insurmountable contradiction, the irremediable, death, etc., then is it not justifiable for the art which deals with these terrors to veil rather than to reveal? And what has this to do with politics?

But incomparably the best means for veiling just these terrors is not art at all but religion. There is no one more adept at veiling and concealing, there is no one more skilled at disguising the true state of affairs than God. And if we grant special privileges to certain "terrors", or permit the unsolvable to be placed on a higher ontological plane than that which can be solved, we simply degrade the artist, whose means are obviously inadequate, and encourage the priests, who are always around us hoping to enter the argument just as this point is reached. If art is a means of concealing the terrors of the abyss it is an inferior means, it is, in the excellent term of Wyndham Lewis, an "inferior religion", a half-way house to the Church.

Moreover it is absurd to say of Baudelaire that he veiled anything. Was not his whole art directed to making us shudder? The author of *Mon Coeur mis à nu*—a revealing title—was even conscious of the fact that the very act of reading tends to encourage in the reader the illusion of being on too high a moral plane, from this illusion he topples us with the insinuating reminder: *"Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère!"* The tragic art, to which Baudelaire's poetry belongs, is not concerned to conceal the dread objects of experience, but to strengthen the human subject in their presence. Like science, tragic poetry is based on the image of man as a problem-solver; when it presents the *unsurmountable,* it does not neglect to hem it in with an abundance of successes on the plane of form. Each phrase with which it invokes the unbridgeable abyss represents an abyss that has been crossed. If God, the dull parent, hides the terrible *mischance,* the tragic poet helps us to look at it, and at the same time prompts us to remember the successes of the human past with its gift for lucky words.

Man is a solver of problems, solutions are as metaphysically real as that which has not been solved, bridges are as absolute as chasms. *And if this were not so there could be no art of tragedy.* There is no tragedy for Christians —although they do not announce the fact, and are dishonest enough to pretend admiration for Shakespeare and the Greeks—for since they conceive man as incapable of solving his *real* problems, his confrontation of an insoluble problem is for them not a *contradiction* of his being (the heart of the tragic), but a *confirmation* of it, a proof of his disability and so much propaganda for God. For Christians only the abyss is real, and insofar as Baudelaire was a Christian it must be admitted that he held to this view, which only

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proves, to use the phrase Fondane borrows so neatly from Nietzsche, that he was not always equal to his crime, that his ideas were inferior to his poetry.

L. A.

A Fault of Learning: A Communication

In the United States our greatest leaders have never been the brightest men of their times. In place of intellectual brilliance they have had another quality which it is the purpose of this short essay to point out, no more than point out—largely by implication.

Washington, who put the country on its feet, was not even considered a good general by his associates—except in the one respect, that he was a good leader. He began his army career by a blunder in the Pennsylvania woods that all but ended in a scandal and he lost nearly every battle he joined thereafter through faulty planning and lack of foresight due to lack of skill. In fact it might be said of his ability that he succeeded in nothing except that which he set out to do, establish the Colonies as an independent state. He was a Mason and accepted that mood without quibble.

Lincoln certainly was no intellectual giant. He merely kept the States together and freed the slaves —as an afterthought. He might also have saved the South, economically, if they had given him the chance; a bigot murdered him. But those achievements, significant as they proved to be, were not of intellectual mintage.

We had, meanwhile, the financial wizard Hamilton.

The intellectual in a democracy has about him certain tendencies inimical to the state. He may dominate them and by so doing put them at the service of the public in the manner of Thorstein Veblen but they are characteristic and peculiarly seductive even to the best minds.

These are, certain intolerances which are likely to be forced upon able men in their efforts to maintain their individual integrity in a group intellectually inferior to them. They can be readily tabulated. In this the intellectual in a democracy resembles intellectuals everywhere in the world, tendencies which if yielded to bring about the most startling correlations of "likes" in the various political scenes: this, in a democracy, comparable to that, in a totalitarian state, hardly to have been suspected until brought into focus by some chance occurrence of their virtual identity.

Two such occurrences, John Dewey's letter to the New York *Times* attacking the picture, *Mission to Moscow*, and Max Eastman's recent article on U. S.-Soviet relations in *Reader's Digest* constitute a case in point.

Relative to a democracy the intellectual may or may not be well meaning. The quality of his thought makes it possible for him to take either side in any controversy and still maintain his logic, a very special thing. It is a type which has come to the fore, sometimes disastrously, at practically every period of crisis in the history of our nation; the same group, with their characteristic affiliations.

The thing to watch is this likeness between our own and others of the same type the world over—superficially as they may be colored by the immediate environment. That is to say if democracy colors their thought it is likely to

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do so only superficially. Their view is small that is to say, circumscribed, as evidenced by their passion for "order" at all costs, how it stinks! or what in another aspect is seen plainly enough to be their limitations.

Nothing is likely to surprise them more than to see themselves aligned with associates among states inimical to the democratic purpose with whom they could, intellectually, go quietly to bed. For instance, would it not surprise John Dewey, greatly as he knows himself to be respected, to find himself by reason of his strictly argued letter in the same class with those who ordered the Easter bombing of Guernica? Or Max Eastman, because of his article in *Reader's Digest*, another Himmler? The mark of the intellectual is there plainly to be seen.

Naturally Dewey and Eastman have committed no crimes as the others with whom I have compared them are criminals. I say merely that there is a resemblance as indicated and that it is a dangerous resemblance which in times like these we, as a group, must guard against.

The significance of this, in a democracy, and this is where the blunders committed by such men as I am speaking of cut deepest, is that whereas Washington and Lincoln were factors for order, such men and many more like them are factors for disorder. It is the intellectual smallness of their positions as contrasted with the largeness in the sense of a great inclusion that is the deciding point.

II

Wallace Stevens in his poem, "Connoisseur of Chaos," stated that, a violent order is disorder. Intellectuals do violence to the body politic by their insistence, in vacuuo, that is, on a basis of pure thought, on some principle, some blockade which must be leveled before action will be permitted to proceed beyond it. No flank attack is recognized. Any biologist would get the absurdity of such a situation at a glance; not, apparently, a philosopher. The Trotzkyite and Stalinist positions reduce themselves finally to the opposing terms of just such a pattern.

Eastman makes his three major points on the U.S.-Soviet relations as follows:

1. Military — There must be complete, effective collaboration among all the Allies on all the fighting fronts, backed by systematic and mutual economic support.

2. Political — There must be uncompromising insistence on the values of free democratic society, and on the hypocritical whitewashes of the evils of dictatorship and totalitarianism: belief in libertarian ideals is a full-time job.

3. Diplomatic — We must have a tough-minded, plain speaking representative in Moscow, who represents the American people (as we are represented in Congress, does he mean, or business?) who knows the Russian achievements, and who realizes that softness in Stalin's eyes breeds contempt.

This is well said. But—There must be, there must be, we must . . . etc. We must face the facts about Russia.—The "facts", says he!

And if there isn't, if we do not? Then what? Must we give up the war? Eastman does not realize that inherent in his permitting himself to spout in this way is a major factor for disorder. Noth-

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ing can be fractured by a denial of his insistences but his own silly pate.

He is of course, in the justice of his three points intellectually unassailable. That isn't his weakness nor is it the way to show him up. Neither does it indicate the harm he does nor point out the surprising identity of his affiliates, that is to say, the over-all quality of his remarks.

To protect ourselves against the limitations contained in the utterances of men such as these a corrective is needed, a means must be found whereby we make allowances for them. We must go beyond them.

III

For it is quite correct for men like Dewey and Eastman, in the specific instances stated, to protest, intellectually, as we have witnessed. But it is equally important, intelligently, not to take them completely at their word. Not surely to take them seriously having the democratic motive in mind. It must never be forgot that their arguments are not real but illustrative only in a narrow area which does not directly concern our present crisis. Dewey with his "instrumentalism" should understand this. As Aldous Huxley said recently of the novel as contrasted with the essay, the essay gives only the few selected high notes of the scale whereas the novel will run the gamut of the entire keyboard. I wish by that merely to introduce the symbol of the whole and its parts.

Understandably the first attack upon an argument such as I present will be under the guise that what I say constitutes an attack upon learning. On the contrary it is a plea for greater learning. I do not reject, I accept and strive to simplify.

To win the war for Democracy and the peace after it we must as far as possible make use of all agencies, as did Lincoln and Washington before him. Lincoln's reply to the prohibitionist who protested that Grant was a heavy drinker and should be removed from command of the troops, that he wished he knew the brand Grant was using that he might give it to the rest of his generals, illustrates what I have in mind. There are grave indictments to be leveled against the Russian state in the name of the democratic liberties —but what kind of wire are they using for their concentration camps to make them so effective against the Fifth Column?

Let us make full use of what Dewey and Eastman are saying but to make proper use of that material we must know precisely what we have hold of. We must comprehend how it is allied with other thought and other acts which we detest.

Formerly we spoke of despots and tyrants now called dictators. They all had their own ideas of "order". These intellectuals of ours are all too frequently cut from the same cloth and if followed too rigidly the effects upon the democratic framework would be disastrous, as Washington when he refused a "crown" at Newburg in 1783 knew only too well.

We forget the old language, what it implied, what it was meant to designate when we made use of the solid term, bigot. Small minds too narrowly restricted to a single viewpoint are always more dangerous to a democracy than any enemy attacking from the outside. They too we must use.

W. C. WILLIAMS

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The Politics of W. C. Williams: An Editorial Note

The remarks offered by W. C. Williams strike us as pretty hectic. He has apparently succumbed to the anti-intellectualism that has long played fast and loose with the American literary mind and is today more blatantly expressed than ever before. But what makes his argument significant is its typicality.

We think that it is typical, first, as an example of the irresponsibility of literary men who, with dubious haste, promote themselves to the position of experts on subjects by which their deeper curiosity has never been aroused and whose real reference mostly escapes them. (In this respect the fate of Ezra Pound ought to serve as an object-lesson for all time. That hapless man recklessly assumed an expertness in political and economic matters about which he actually knew next to nothing, and all on the strength of his reputation as a poet and analyst of literary effects.) Secondly, Williams' argument is typical of the present state of mind of American writers, many of whom, under the pressure of the war and reactionary opinion, cannot seem to do enough to prove their conformity. Thus John Chamberlain has of late discovered that capitalism is the sole guaranty of human liberty; and Clifton Fadiman has embraced the Vansittart thesis of the innate and permanent guilt of the German people—a thesis which being nothing more than an inversion of Nazi racial doctrine, obviously has its uses in preparing the ground for an imperialist peace. It is in the light of these and other instances of the same kind that the statements made by Williams become politically intelligible.

For only in a debased cultural situation such as we are now experiencing could a writer like Williams, whose accomplishments in his own medium are unquestionable, undertake to reject outright the cultural functions peculiar to the intellectuals. Against them he unlooses a rhetoric of innuendo and logical amalgam, interspersed with familiar anecdotes about the heroes of American history. But what, one may ask, is the exact connection between any given attitude to Soviet Russia and the fact that Washington and Lincoln were not "the brightest men of their time"? Maybe it takes an intellectual to notice that no such connection exists. Whether he knows it or not, Williams' linking of the two is a mere device enabling him to invoke the national pieties of America as a sanction for the extra-national pieties of the Communist Party and its mob of "friends" and sympathizers. If it is nationalism that Williams puts his faith in, then he would be better advised to stick to his own.

Williams appears to take great pride in the fact that Washington and Lincoln were not intellectuals. Well, Hitler and Goering are not intellectuals either; nor Stalin. Mussolini, on the other hand, might be said to be an intellectual of a sort; also Goebbels and Rosenberg. But Jefferson *was* an intellectual, and so was Lenin. So what? Nothing follows from all this. For Williams, however, such combinations, doctored to suit himself, seem to hold a kind of devious meaning that permits him somehow to connect intellectuality with fascism. In this fashion, though perhaps we are not meant to take his words too seriously, he plays the game of the philistines, whose stock-in-trade has always

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been intellectual-baiting, homage of the self-made man of action, and appeals to some mythic sense of reality beyond the bounds of reason and imaginative conception. In practice such appeals cannot but result in that glorification of the "practical", as widespread as it is vicious, by means of which the men of power and property ever try to beat down the men of art and the men of thought.

As expressed here, Williams' politics are but a literary version of the more obvious Stalinist apologetics. To silence criticism of the Soviet government, Williams raises the spectre of disunity and military difficulties—the habitual strategy of those groups and individuals that have reason to fear criticism. So Secretary Hull has recently let it be known that the critics of the State Department are giving "aid and comfort to the enemy." Yet if Stalin is to be exempt from criticism because he is fighting Hitler, why not offer the same courtesy to Churchill and Roosevelt? We notice that the Stalinists do not in the least restrain themselves when it pays them to criticize the war-policies of Britain and the United States. (The second front issue is a prime example.) But whenever freedom of criticism is exercised against them, their invariable reply is to charge collaboration with the enemy.

We in no way associate ourselves with the political position either of Dewey or of Eastman. (We might say in passing that in our opinion the latter is politically quite as vulnerable as John Chamberlain.) But in so far as they have helped to expose the real meaning of the Moscow trials and to show up the pretension of the Stalinists to be something else than what they are, both Dewey and Eastman have rendered an invaluable service. It is characteristic of Williams that he makes no effort to disprove factually the anti-Stalinist argument. All he does is insinuate, in the wake of the notorious Mr. Joseph E. Davies, that the justification of the purges lies in their elimination of the Fifth Column. Just what Fifth Column of old Bolshevik leaders is Williams talking about? What actually does he know about men like Burkharin, Pyatokov, Tukachevsky, Gamarnik, Yakir, Sokolnikov, Zinoviev, and other veteran commanders of the Red Army and chiefs of the Soviet state? There is no evidence that Williams has even taken the trouble to familiarize himself with the material on the subject, such as the volume put out by the Commission headed by John Dewey. Williams' insinuations are therefore gratuitous, and so is his assumption that a criticism of *Mission to Moscow*—a film that distorts even the book on which it is based—is by definition an intellectual crime. And just as last winter the *Daily Worker* accused Dubinsky and other labor leaders opposing the trade-union maneuvres of the Communist Party of being responsible for the fall of Kharkov, so now Williams accuses Dewey of being in league with "those who ordered the bombing of Guernica." This is the sort of weird collusion of facts and ideas that anyone in the least acquainted with the style of Stalinist polemics can spot at a glance. By using the same method it could be stated that Williams is in a class with Captain Rickenbacker, who now counsels a friendly line on Russia, or that his poetry is to be identified with that of Alfred Noyes, who used an argument

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similar to Williams' to assert that intellectuals like Proust caused the defeat of France.

And this, too, should be said, that judging by Williams' remarks he accepts at face value not only the claims of Stalinism but also the claims, equally questionable, of the democratic belligerents in this war. Perhaps it is because he is in so much of a hurry to castigate the relatively powerless intellectuals that he has nothing to say against the policy of those groups and classes that actually hold power and determine the course of events. The truth is that we might more profitably concern ourselves with the fault of political ignorance and intellectual masochism than with the fault of learning.

We are at one with Williams in supporting the great war-effort of the Russian people. But not for a moment do we believe that the cause of democracy is served by suppressing criticism of Stalin's totalitarian regime.

Grandeur and Misery of a Poster Girl

Forewarned is forearmed. So precipitous have been the shifts and turns of Miss Muriel Rukeyser's career that surely a new category is necessary to account for one's feelings—the category of expected astonishment. What will be Miss Rukeyser's next move? The latest is a piece in *The New Republic* of August 2 entitled "Words and Images."

But to begin at the beginning. Let us think back to the distant year, 1935, when Miss Rukeyser published her first volume of verse. Here she plumped with romping vigor for the Revolution, rode the bandwagon of proletarian literature, flew in an airplane like a character in Auden's work of that period, and cried Yes like Molly Bloom to the working class. So, too, in her second volume she wrote indignant though fashionable poetry about the plight of the West Virginian miners—under the curious impression that to protest against the lack of proper safeguards in the mines is to tear at the very roots of capitalism. One should keep in mind, though, that the West Virginian miners were a topic of the day, and topics of the day are for Miss Rukeyser the music of the bandwagon coming.

But soon Marxism had ceased to be popular, and in addition Miss Rukeyser had already been upset by a newspaper interviewer who asked her if she was a communist. (Her reply was that she was voting for La Guardia.) Yet the losing fashion did not leave Miss Rukeyser at a loss. She came out in favor of Symbols and published poems entitled *A Turning Wind* in which she said that people were afraid of Symbols and of Poetry. In one poem the turning wind was figured in the symbol of a man torturing an eagle. The eagle was not the blue eagle of the springtime of the New Deal. Miss Rukeyser was prepared. How else was it possible to please Stephen Vincent Benèt and Horace Gregory at the same time?

If the lines of her verse often seemed to resemble a bathrobe; if Kenneth Patchen was her only equal in the mastery of the inexact adjective and the dangling participle; if she shifted back and forth between the orgiastic diction of D. H. Lawrence at his worst and a style suggesting that of *Time*

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magazine and a persistent effort to send many telegrams at small cost to oneself—if all this was the case, what of it? A dangling participle is no crime. Everything has its good side; the befuddlement of Miss Rukeyser's syntax rendered her lines less and less meaningful—a keen relief! One thing was clear: this young poetess was intent on being friends with everyone, though in citing Waldo Frank as a source of her ideas she exposed her proper affiliations. It is true that indiscriminate friendship makes for promiscuity. But why carp when so many human beings hate each other?

Yet one must draw the line somewhere. The Japanese did not astonish Miss Rukeyser, much as they surprised Admiral Kimmel and General Short. Sooner than one can say iambic pentameter, Miss Rukeyser, though deep in researches for a big book, produced *Wake Island*, a poster-poem in which she wrapped herself in Old Glory, sang the Star Spangled Banner, and chased the Marines in lines that resembled not a bathrobe but a blimp. Poetic considerations and considerations of a decent respect for one's previous avowals may be for the moment put aside, for we cannot live by art alone and consistency is obviously for small minds. At about the same time she published, in *Twice-a-Year*, the text of a lecture on poetry, addressed to Vassar girls. Here she was revealed in a new role: that of a big-league representative of the "creative spirit," speaking her piece with all the unctuousness and culture-*schmerz* of a junior theologian of poetics.

Soon after Miss Rukeyser's biography of Willard Gibbs appeared. In this biography it was difficult to make out which was worse, the abuse of the mind or the abuse of the English language. Gibbs as a great physicist was celebrated in this book for many reasons, such as the fact that his father was opposed to slavery and that Gibbs' discoveries had made possible the overwhelming might of the *Wehrmacht*. And Gibbs appeared to be (although one cannot be sure, so vague are some of the sentences) not only a great physicist but somehow a great poet and a great mystic in a confusion of the nature of art and the nature of science not heretofore unknown, but here rhapsodized in such terms as to deprive both science and art of all meaning. Surely even friendship has its limits. Even if all things are one, where is the necessity of unifying them anew by beating language to a pulp?

And now, tireless and amiable as ever, Miss Rukeyser has turned to critical prose. She writes in the summer issue of *The Kenyon Review* of Rilke's great sonnets with such lucid metaphors as these: "All the pieces of his fear, all the withdrawals are here; but in this book, since the object is acknowledged dead, there is no threat." "Here is the long unfolding of a single image-cluster, transformed and killed and taken up again, sustained by Rilke through wartime." But more is to come: expect to be astonished.

In *The New Republic* for August 2 Miss Rukeyser plumps for words and images on posters. She unites the Detroit race riots, conquest of North Africa, the food problems, the ruin of cities, the man-power situation with the necessity for good posters, as if a race-riot and a poor poster were disasters of equal seriousness, or effect and cause. It is all, she feels,

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a problem of meanings, and with the sleight-of-hand of those who discover the sources of Hitlerism in Wagner and Nietzsche, she argues that a poet with a poster can win the war, bringing to mind the dapper ghost of James J. Walker, a famous song-writer, who remarked, when a question of the censorship of books arose, "I never heard of a girl who was ruined by a book!"

What next? Anything is possible, provided one cares not at all for one's previous commitments. There is a hint in *The New Republic* piece that Miss Rukeyser is now interested in the advertising game. As Ring Lardner used to say, there is a limit to games and to fun, and to quote once more: "Fun is fun, but a girl can't keep laughing all the time." The notion of big billboards on federal highways with words by Miss Rukeyser and perhaps artwork by Thomas Hart Benton—what a prospect for the war-weary millions.

There will always be enough bandwagons. The coming of peace may bring a new period of social consciousness and then Miss Rukeyser may reappear as an Old Bolshevik. In fact, there is no position to which Miss Rukeyser cannot have recourse, having been so active at every one of them, from *New Masses* proletarianism to neo-Americanism. It should be remembered, too, that in the not-so-distant-future the post of Librarian of Congress may well be available again. Miss Rukeyser, who is the recipient of a large cash-prize from the Academy of Arts and Letters, not to speak of other prizes, fellowships, and honorable mentions, is thoroughly qualified to succeed Archibald MacLeish if that gentleman should ever choose to retire.

Any day now Miss Rukeyser may appear with a poster, interpreting the 4 freedoms to the American people. This is the part for which she presents herself in her *New Republic* bull.—"We can make bold images, forward-looking images," "campaigns of images," "we can tie in the problems of food, of coal, of warm underwear," "we need to surpass ourselves," "we can only surpass ourselves by facing our own time, and by using our weapons."

Miss Rukeyser has not yet surpassed herself. But the weapons are at hand. Perhaps her poster, inscribed with "bold images," will launch a new version of the 4 freedoms:

FREE VERSE
FREE LOVE
FREE LUNCH
FREE-FOR-ALL.

R. S. P.

*Socialism and the Failure of Nerve—The Controversy Continued**

Reply to Sidney Hook

The resort of this scrupulous democrat, humanist and enemy of Bolshevik virulence to philistine invective will not help him to convince those who doubt his views. The facts that he evades and that are plain to any reader of his articles in the *Partisan Review*, *The New Leader* and *The Call*, are these: in 1939, both before and after the war had broken out, he opposed the war, he attacked the Popular Front as lead-

* Cf. "The Failure of the Left" by Sidney Hook (PARTISAN REVIEW, March-April, 1943) and "Socialism and the Failure of Nerve: An Exchange by David Merian and Sidney Hook (May-June, 1943).

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ing inevitably to war, and he named it an imperialist war. In the summer of 1940, he called it a war in defense of the great American dream that every socialist must support. Somewhere along the line he has changed his grounds of judgment. Three years later, he gives his reasons why the victory of Hitler will have the inevitable effect of destroying the labor and socialist movement: the perfection of military instruments, the use of hunger as a weapon, the monopoly over economic, cultural and educational means. These three reasons were no less evident in 1939 than in 1943. Hitler had already crushed the labor movement in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia and had helped to destroy it in Spain. The popular fronts and war-mongering that he had attacked in 1939 urged just this argument, that another successful aggression of Hitler would mean the end of democracy and the movement for socialism in the whole world. Hook condemned this argument as opportunistic, short-sighted and an "invitation to disaster". In 1939 he was convinced that whatever the political differences between the regimes of the opposed countries and whatever their relative military strength, the war could not advance democracy or the interests of the socialist movement. To tell us now that in calling on him to explain this change in his views, I am confusing three kinds of front, is only to throw dust in the eyes of his readers.

One can understand that the rapid defeat of France in 1940 and the support of Hitler by the Soviet Union at that time, should demoralize opponents of the war and create a mood of despair. But later events have shown that Hitler is unable to organize a fascist Europe without further extension of the war and without calling forth intense resistance of the conquered peoples because of the necessary acuteness of the exploitation and insecurity. They have shown also that the Soviet Union, which Hook has characterized as "the identical twin" of Nazism, was sooner or later, as Trotsky predicted, to be attacked by Germany; and that England and the United States are not fighting for democracy but for world domination. Their plans for the peace include the application of those three means which, according to Hook, imply the inevitable fascization of the world. It may be argued that suppression of socialist workers and colonial peoples by the Allied imperialists will be less thorough and brutal than the suppression by Hitler, but does this difference justify the support of the war by socialists, and can it ever excuse the masking of this war as a fight for the ideals of the French revolution and the "great American dream"?

It is essentially on the basis of a false military and political estimate of the future course of the war that Hook changed his views. This false estimate compels him to be silent now about the war with Japan, which unlike Germany has invaded the American continent. He became so convinced over night of the immediate catastrophic consequences of a Hitler victory that he sacrificed to the war position the cautions and resolutions acquired by socialists through bitter experience. He gave up what little faith he had in the masses and in the possibility of a superior and more honest resistance to fascism under the banner of socialism. The revolu-

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tionary movement in this country is weak, but weakness of number is no reason for yielding to a false position which promises now, as in the past, to bring us no nearer to our goals.

Hook ridicules as fantastic the idea that the English and French workers could have demanded and taken power for a really democratic struggle against fascism. Yet he himself believes that in the United States, where the workers are much less organized and politically conscious than in France and England, "*complete military victory over Hitler*" requires that the workers take the leadership in the conduct of the war and that the war be fought "in a *total* democratic fashion" (his italics). This judgment is obviously false. Superiority of Allied industry and arms over the Axis does not need today the leadership of the workers or total democracy; but it does require the subservience of the workers to the national imperialist interest, it requires that the workers should not strike or resist the economic burdens that the war places upon them.

If I wrote that "the question of political support of the war by the left parties is at this date of no practical significance for the military outcome", it is because I was convinced that the war had reached a stage in which the military victory of the Allies was unlikely to be affected by revolutionary anti-war agitation in the United States. But for the economic consequences of the war in both the victorious and defeated countries, the struggle for workers' power, the constant exposure of the imperialist aims, the defense of the economic interests of the workers, and the strengthening of their international ties in a revolutionary spirit, are certainly of great practical significance. For these ends, without which the anticipated growth of reaction cannot be checked or the radical movement revived, the program of Hook is completely inadequate and false. He conceals the imperialist character of the war, he ties the proposed labor party hand and foot to the government by his Clemenceau plan, and he chooses to minimize or ignore the economic needs of the workers. When he tells us that he cannot concern himself with economic conditions, since prices, taxes and wages are by their nature unstable and therefore cannot be leading issues in a program for a labor party during the war, he betrays his opportunism and shows the incompatibility of his war position and socialist aims.

The other matters in dispute between us are not irrelevant to our differences on the war. The importance Hook gives to the religious "failure of nerve" as an essentially ideological problem, and his method of amalgamating with it the criticism of the war flow from the assumptions behind his war position. As a supporter of democratic liberalism, he now directs his attack chiefly against two opponents: Leninism and the remnants of feudalism, and discovers that the greatest menace to our culture comes from the metaphysicians and the theologians, not from capitalism itself and the commercialization and official control of culture. The old polemic of the bourgeoisie against feudal ideas replaces the Marxist polemic against capitalist society.

On the question of "class truths", he misrepresents simultaneously Marx, the old Hook and his present critic. None of us

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asserted that the truths of socialist theory are not scientifically valid or that their class character lies simply in the unwillingness of a certain group to adopt them. I made it clear that most social scientists are also unlikely to accept the scientific findings of the Marxian analysis of capitalist society. They are class truths because they are formulated from the viewpoint of a class interest; they are designed to bring out the hidden relations of capitalist economy and politics in order to make possible their overthrow; they also help to define goals which are the goals of the workers rather than their exploiters. In abandoning the concept, after likening it to the "racial truth" of Nazism, Hook blunts the revolutionary edge of the truths of socialism. If conservative investigators are more likely to accept Marxist ideas when their class character is concealed or minimized, that will be because those ideas have been stripped of their effectiveness and made the grounds for policies of collaboration.

His defense of Dewey's position on force and intelligence shows how far he will go in accomodating himself to an anti-revolutionary thinker. Obviously, force and intelligence are not opposed methods; intelligent analysis of a situation may show that force is one of its components and that a counter-force is the best means of overcoming it. The support of the present war by the old sworn enemies of violence makes it necessary for them to admit this. But Dewey is less consistent and clear on this point than Hook would have us believe. In *Liberalism and Social Action* (1936), which Hook called the "high-water mark of an indigenous American radicalism" and which he likened to a Communist Manifesto of the 20th century, Dewey takes another stand: "the question is whether force or intelligence is to be the method upon which we consistently rely and to whose promotion we devote our energies". Here he opposes class struggle as unscientific and appeals fallaciously to physics for an argument against the use of force: violence is bound to provoke counter-violence, the "Newtonian law of action and reaction still holds in physics, and violence is physical" (although elsewhere he condemns the "assimilation of human science to physical science" as "only another form of absolutistic logic"). I leave it to Hook to reconcile this critique of the "method of force" with support of the war.

DAVID MERIAN.

Faith, Hope, and Dialectic: Merian in Wonderland

Having failed to meet straightforward argument, Merian is now reduced to complaint about my alleged inconsistencies, and to outright invention about my beliefs. Even for a Bolshevik-Leninist he goes to surprising lengths. First on the score of inconsistency. Were his complaint justified, this would still be mere *argumentum ad hominem*, for my past position might have been false and my present one sound. But his complaint is not justified, for it ignores the tremendous difference between conditions before the war and conditions in 1940, when Hitler gained the mastery of Europe.

1. Precisely what were the changes in my position and why did I make them? Before the war I opposed labor and socialist partipication in *Popular Front* gov-

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ernments. I still do. Before the war I supported, as internal policy, a *United Front* on military goals with any democratic government fighting a Fascist counter-revolution or invasion (*e. g. Spain*). I still do. But before the war broke out I was opposed to support of foreign war against Hitler for two reasons. (1) There still seemed some chance that in France and elsewhere labor and its allies might come to power on an anti-fascist and pro-socialist program; (2) I believed that Hitler could hardly stand up against the military alliance of democratic countries. The coming of war invalidated the first reason, and within one year Hitler was at the English channel, in possession of the strongest force in history. It was then that I urged that military aid be sent to England even at the risk of our involvement. For though I realized that the risk to democracy and to the possibility of socialism was very grave as a result of the war, I was then, as now, convinced that a Nazi military victory would destroy existing democratic institutions and cut off the hope for socialism, whereas a Nazi defeat might well produce conditions favorable to the revival of the workers' movement in Europe. Merian's program not only opposed military aid to England but actually called upon the English workers to refuse military support to their own government. This program, if adopted, would have insured Hitler's conquest of England. Finally, in the past as well as the present, I have opposed a *National Front*, a one-sided truce that binds labor to accept in advance whatever interpretation other classes put upon the national emergency and which hampers the effort to make less unequal the burdens and sacrifices of the common struggle.

Merian explains his statement that the question of political support of the war has no practical significance on the ground that "the military victory of the Allies" is now practically assured. If this is so, then it is precisely because the labor movement of England and the United States did *not* follow Merian's line; because aid *was* sent to countries fighting Hitler; because the workers of democratic countries at war with Hitler did *not* contend, as Merian did, that their *chief* enemy at the moment was their own government. In one breath Merian counts upon the military victory of the Allies, not only for his life but for his right to agitate for socialism; in another, he advocates a policy which would make that victory impossible. Or is he entering a plea of avoidance on the ground that he doesn't expect anybody to listen to him?

The main question I put to Merian he has evaded. If refusal by the labor movement to support the military war against Hitler were to lead to a Fascist victory would Merian favor this policy? If he says "no," he is wasting our time. (For the program I outlined provides for the necessary activities of an independent labor movement against domestic reaction within the framework of those democratic forms whose continued existence depends upon the defeat of Hitler.) If he answers "yes", which is the consequent Bolshevik-Leninist position, I have already shown in ample detail how foolish such a policy would be from the point of view of the interests of democracy and socialist action throughout the world. Merian fails to come to grips with a sin-

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gle point in the argument: his rejoinder is therefore irrelevant.

2. Some readers of P. R. have written to inquire why I bothered to reply to Merian's ill-mannered and factional attacks. I did so because his position is such a beautiful specimen of what I have called "metaphysical apriorism" in left-wing politics. I think it is instructive to lay bare the central nerve of this apriorism. Consider what Merian's position entails as it concerns the war between capitalist democracies and Germany, on the one hand, and 'socialist' dictatorships and Germany on the other. If Russia is attacked by Hitler, Merian believes that the Russian workers should of course rally to the support of the military war. But if the U. S. or England is attacked by Hitler, Merian urges the workers to refuse military support even if the consequences guarantee a Nazi victory. Now, why the difference? Because, forsooth, Russia is a "worker's state", though as an orthodox Trotskyist Merian believes it to be rather degenerated. To say that a totalitarian "worker's state" should be defended against attack by Fascism and a democratic bourgeois state should not, is to say that Russian workers have a greater stake in their country than English and American workers have in their own. (Even if this were true, the main question, so far as the war is concerned, would still remain to be settled: and that is whether the workers stand to gain more from the preservation of a democratic England and America than from a victorious Fascism.)

But how is it known that the Russian workers have a greater stake in their country than the English and American workers have in theirs? Have they a greater material stake, a stake in a freer culture and in a more democratic political structure? All the empirical evidence shows that the contrary actually is the case. What, then, makes Russia a "worker's state"? A decree nationalizing the instruments of production —not more democracy, not a better standard of living, not an unregimented culture. In almost every respect the workers of U. S. and Britain may enjoy better conditions than the workers of the U. S. S. R. (including the right to organize and agitate for still better conditions) but under no circumstances does this justify their supporting the present war against Fascism. For, you see, they have no nationalization decree—that all-saving abstraction whose presence or absence has in reality very few of the differential effects required by Merian's monistic dogma. Not even the circumstance that the victory of Russia may depend upon the support given their own governments by the workers of America and Britain alters the case for the intransigeant Trotskyist. Until the instruments of production have been nationalized, *no* war waged by a bourgeois democracy can be supported by socialists against *any* enemy including one whose agenda calls for the immediate liquidation of all socialists.

We can now see why instead of investigating each political proposal and weighing the consequences of action one way or another in relation to the chances of the workers coming closer to socialism, Merian resorts to a formula and a faith that remain valid for every situation no matter what the consequences. That is why it makes no difference to him

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how strong Hitler was militarily in 1936 or 1940. That is why he reproaches me for taking into account important changes in conditions which are not caused by changes in productive forces although they may have effects upon them. That is why in effect he argued previously that since capitalism could not be stabilized, socialism would ultimately be victorious even if all socialists were killed or put into Hitler's concentration camps. At every crucial point in the discussion Merian falls back upon the state of productive forces, not in their functional but in their legalistic form, as if that *alone* determined military, cultural and political history. The fetishism of productive forces is the hall-mark of orthodox Marxism, under all its political labels, even when it theoretically admits, in the face of criticism, the facts of reciprocity. In politics Merian is a victim to this kind of thinking. He does not approach specific problems of political action as a scientific Marxist but as a metaphysician with a dogma which is true no matter what, and therefore exempt from the test of consequences. The radical movement, too, has its *religieuse!*

3. The most charitable interpretation of most of Merian's other remarks is that blinded by his dogma, he has failed either to read aright or to report correctly or to pay me the simple justice of trying to understand my views. After all what can I say to someone who charges me with "choosing to minimize or ignore the economic needs of the workers." No retort to these and other outrageous charges will convince Merian, and I am confident that most of the readers of P R do not have to be convinced. There are some other statements of Merian, however, less extreme but no less false on which I shall comment briefly.

(a) I have never said that the present war is a war *for* democracy, or a war *for* the ideals of the French Revolution and the American dream, although I have said that Fascism is a movement against them. Merian's thinking is astonishingly crude at this point. If I observe that Fascism leads to the liquidation of the Jews does it follow that I believe that the war is being fought *for* the safety of the Jews as so many anti-Semites claim? The war *is* being fought for many reasons. Some of them are as unworthy as are some of the reasons for which it is being opposed. My problem was: *should* the labor and socialist movement support the war, and why? More than three years ago, I said in the *New Leader* what I substantially repeated in PR. "The nub of the matter is this. Democratic capitalism, if it is preserved against the onslaughts of Fascism, gives at least the possibility of organized activity in behalf of socialism; the victory of Fascism, however, carries with it the practical certainty of the total liquidation of the labor and socialist movement throughout the world." (N. L. 8/31/40) That the war is partly imperialistic does not gainsay this truth. Nor does the existence of Japan or India. The Spanish Republic failed to give Morocco its independence but this did not make the defeat of Franco less mandatory. Things are rarely as simple as in Merian's never-never land.

(b) From the point of view of Churchill and others, it certainly is true that complete military victory over Hitlerism does not require that democratization of the

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war effort, including its domestic and foreign propaganda, which I stressed as part of the *immediate* agitational program of an independent Labor Party. Without discounting the importance of industry or arms, I was urging the military importance of *political* war against Fascism both at home and abroad. This line cannot be tested until it is actually followed, and the chances of it being followed are unfortunately remote. But if there were in existence an independent Labor Party of the kind I described the likelihood of its being adopted would be far greater. It would be easier to rally public sentiment against reactionaries everywhere. Merian twists my proposals as if they were intended to tie labor to imperialist elements in the government, induce it to forego strikes, and not to resist unjust economic burdens. He misses the whole significance of the fact that my article was directed, in the main, *against* the "progressive front" whose support of Roosevelt has led to the neglect of organization and militant action on the home front. It is downright silly to infer from my view that workers should never strike—or, for that matter, that they should always strike. Merian wants an easy answer, but all we can say is that here, too, it is a question of weighing consequences in each case in the light of certain general principles. The effect of a strike on a military victory over Fascism must always be considered, but there are effects and effects; and they have a different significance in different phases of the war.

(c) One who has not looked at p. 78 of Dewey's *Liberalism and Social Action* will hardly believe that the very next sentence after the one quoted by Merian to prove that Dewey counterposes force to intelligence, reads: "Insistence that the use of violent force is *inevitable* limits the use of available intelligence, for wherever the inevitable reigns intelligence cannot be used." The context of the sentence quoted by Merian is not whether force can ever be used intelligently but whether it must always be used in revolutions. And on p. 87 Dewey actually discusses the conditions under which "force may be intelligently employed"! Yet Merian insists that Dewey's real meaning is that force and intelligence are necessarily opposed. Professor Dewey, who is a democratic socialist, may be as "anti-revolutionary a thinker" as Merian believes him to be; but only rabid political bias will picture him as an egregious fool, systematically guilty of a *contradicto in adjecto*. There is nothing deliberate in Merian's misreading of a plain text. It is a petty symbol of the moral tragedy of our time, of that political cannibalism, which, growing out of the Bolshevik Revolution, denies to those who question it, whether on strategical or even tactical issues, first sincerity, then intelligence, and, finally, humanity.

(d) "As a supporter of democratic liberalism Hook directs his attack chiefly against two opponents: Leninism and the remnants of feudalism, and discovers that the greatest menace to our culture comes from the metaphysicians and theologians, not from capitalism itself . . ." On this delicious passage I wish to conclude. Now, why should I, as "a supporter of democratic liberalism", mainly attack Leninism (by "Leninism" Merian invariably means "Trotskyism") and feudalism? Should not a democratic liberal mainly attack Fascism? It would seem so, but not from Merian's position. After all, what is democratic liberal-

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ism? From Merian's point of view, it is essentially support of the capitalist order. And Fascism? Fascism is essentially support of capitalism in its period of decline. Indeed, by the logic of productive forces, capitalism in its Fascist form grows out of capitalism in its liberal form. Despite their difference on relatively minor matters, on the chief issue, viz., capitalism or socialism, a democratic liberal has more in common with a Fascist than with a genuine socialist who, by definition, is a Trotskyist. Let no one think I am forcing a meaning on Merian. This is canonic Trotskyist doctrine and explains why "as a supporter of democratic liberalism" I *must* concentrate my attack on the Trotskyists as the leading enemy. For, whether they know it or not, on this principal issue of the age, liberals and Fascists are allies! Here is cement enough for any kind of amalgam.

(On this theory my compulsion to attack feudalism is presumably due to a pious regard for my bourgeois revolutionary ancestors or maybe to a Freudian reversion, if it is permissible to mix Freudianism with Trotskyism.)

Similarly, Churchill, Hitler, and Roosevelt must also attack Trotskyism as the leading enemy. Stalin *should* act differently, but that wicked man refuses to understand that the Trotskyists are all for the Russian nationalization decrees, which is what chiefly counts, although they oppose his regime as an unpleasant but passing historical phenomenon.

Now Merian is nothing if not a sober man. He has himself assured us of this. But if he retains any political sobriety surely he will admit this somewhat exaggerates the menace of Trotskyism. The fact is that the Trotskyists are not regarded anywhere as the villians of the piece, except in that "worker's state" so esteemed by Merian. Why, then, must I, as a "democratic liberal," pick on Trotskyist and feudal remnants?

Whatever Merian means, it apparently compels him to invent his facts. Since Pearl Harbor and until Merian's attack, I have made only one passing reference to Trotskyism, and that without mentioning it by name. I have aimed my political fire at (a) clerical totalitarianism—which Merian foolishly dismisses as a remnant of feudalism because this is the only place provided for it in his scheme of productive forces—, (b) at Stalinism, and (c) chiefly at uncritical support of the Roosevelt regime by the labor and progressive movement. As a "democratic liberal" it may not be Trotskyist cricket for me to do this. But these are the facts.

As for the charge that I regard the metaphysicians and theologians as the greatest menace to our culture, the readers of PR have the evidence in their own hands on p. 8 of the January, 1943 issue:

"The causes of the failure of nerve in our time are multiple and obvious. Economic crises, world war, a bad peace, tragically inept statesmanship, the tidal waves of totalitarianism, tell the story of the twentieth century. These are the phenomena that are behind the interrupted careers, the frustrated hopes, the anxiety, the sense of being lost and alone, the growing bewilderment, fear and horror—that feed the theology of despair and the politics of wish. It is important to remember this. The 'arguments' of those who have been panicked into embracing the new varieties of transcendental consolation may be met a thousand times over. But not until a democratic, freedom-and-welfare-planning economy is built out of what is left of our world, in which stable traditions can absorb the conventions of revolt of political man and the experiments of growth of individual men, will these intellectual excesses subside from epidemic to episodic proportions. Until then it is necessary to prevent intellectual hysteria from infecting those who still cling to the principles of rational experiment and analysis."

SIDNEY HOOK

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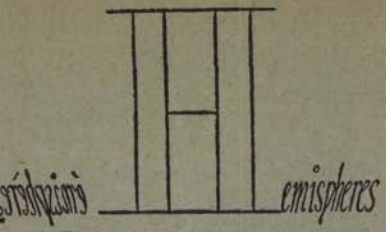

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